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FRANK READE IN SIBERIA.

BRAVE DEEDS AND GALLANT RESCUES IN THE LAND OF THE CZAR.

CHAPTER 1.

A Story of Russian Tyranny.—Frank Reade in the Air Again.—Face to Face with Destruction.—Rescued in the Nick of Time.

THE smart little city of Readestown was all astir, and a great crowd was collected about the entrance to the mammoth machine-shop of Frank Reade, the wonderful young inventor, from whose father the town had taken its name.

Upon the gate of this workshop was placed a placard announcing that the young inventor required one hundred skilled mechanics to work upon the construction of his new airship, and the crowd consisted of those who were eager to apply for a job.

Less than a week previously, Frank Reade had received a visit from a distinguished foreigner, a gentleman of letters and science from far-away Russia, who bore letters of introduction from two old friends of Frank—Professor Dorebus and Dr. Vaneyke.

Nicolas Petrovitch, the stranger was named, and he came to the young inventor with a startling story.

"I will be brief in presenting my case to you, Mr. Reade," he said, after the usual commonplace greetings had been exchanged. "I will first give you a little story, or rather a truthful narration, of a great wrong and a foul crime. When I was at school in St. Petersburg, fifteen years ago, my dear companion and fellow-student, Myles Zabriskie, fell in love with a girl whose parents were avowed in their prejudice against the Czar and the Government. He had a rival named Carlos Dolrouki, who was an adherent to the Czar. As soon as Dolrouki found that his rival was winning the love of the fair Olga, his jealousy was inflamed, and he began scheming to effect the defeat of Myles. He was an unscrupulous fellow, and by no means particular as to the means he employed to gain his ends.

"I warned Myles of the villain, but the unfortunate fellow did not heed my warning. As a result, certain reports found circulation, backed up by circumstantial evidence, that

Myles was one of a gang of plotters against the Czar's life. The west wing of the palace was one morning blown up with dynamite. The Czar was uninjured, but several attendants were killed. The district police were quickly upon the spot, and the result was that the police invaded our apartments, and arrested Myles and myself.

"We were both innocent, but that availed us nothing, for, after a very short trial, we were banished to Siberia. This was the villainous work of Dolrouki, but he did not gain his coveted end after all. Olga was inconsolable over her lover's fate, and swore she would never marry any other man. In vain Dolroukie strove to win her, but she has proved faithful to her vows.

After five years I was pardoned and came back from exile; but Zabriskie is still there. When I left him, however, I made an oath to try to secure his pardon, or effect his rescue in some way. For ten years I have laboured in vain to do that, and, chancing to become acquainted with Professor Dorebus in Moscow, I learned of you and your wonderful inventions, and this is the mission which has brought me to your house. I desire to effect the rescue of my friend, and I earnestly beg your assistance and co-operation. I am instructed by the Princess Olga to offer you a handsome fortune, if that will be any inducement to you."

Petrovitch ceased speaking, and gazed earnestly at Frank Reade. The world-famous inventor was silent for a moment.

"What is your plan of procedure?" he asked, suddenly.

"To proceed directly to Siberia in one of your wonderful airships, and release Myles. It will be easy to cross the frontier in the airship. At an appointed place Olga will meet us, and after Myles has been rescued we will come to America with you, where the lovers will find a new and happy home."

"But have you considered the question of international complications?" asked Frank, quickly. "For me to invade the domains of the Czar and liberate a State prisoner would be meddling with the affairs of a foreign

country. It might develop into a serious affair."

A shadow of disappointment crossed the face of Nicolas Petrovitch. But ere he could speak, an idea occurred to Frank and prompted him to put a question.

"Where is this Carlos Dolrouki now?" he asked.

"Ah, he has fallen from his high fortune," responded Petrovitch. "He lost all his wealth at the gaming-table, but being a loyal henchman of the Czar he has found Government employ, and is a slave-driver in some of the village mines of Irkutsk."

"Ah! then there is a chance that we may run across him if we take a trip there?"

"Possibly," said Petrovitch, wondering what Frank was driving at.

"If Zabriskie's innocence were proved, would he not be free to return?"

"Certainly; but that, I fear, is quite impossible."

"Not at all. You say that he was convicted upon the word of Dolrouki?"

"Yes."

"Very well. If Dolrouki can be induced to confess, then Zabriskie may be cleared, and be safe to return to his home. Suppose we first find Dolrouki, and try to force or induce him to make that confession?"

"Capital idea, if it can be done!" cried Petrovitch, excitedly.

"I believe that it can be done," said Frank, quietly. "I am interested in your story, M. Petrovitch, and I will pledge myself and the new airship which I am constructing to the effort to clear up the wrongs of Myles Zabriskie. Is this satisfactory?"

Petrovitch sprang from his chair and grasped Frank's hand, pouring out a volume of thanks.

"Did you think of accompanying us?" Frank asked, quietly.

"Certainly," replied Petrovitch.

"Then you may come back here in three weeks from to-day. With good luck, the new airship will be ready by that time."

"But will not Doctor Vaneyke also accompany us?"

"If he chooses to."

"Then I may as well explain right here that the righting of Myles Zabriskie's wrongs is not the only motive for inducing you to take us over Asia in your airship."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Frank, in surprise. "What do you mean?"

Petrovitch drew from his pocket a chart, and placed it upon the table. It was a map of Central Asia, and the Russian scientist placed a finger upon a group of mountains.

"These are the Jablonoi Mountains," he declared. "The steppes are to the northward of these. While in exile a band of us were sent into these mountains to work a small mine. While there we visited the wonderful elevated table-land, or plateau, several hun-

dred feet in height and over one hundred miles long.

"The wonderful thing about this elevated plateau is that its sides are so very precipitous that no man can scale them. They are sheer and smooth in their descent.

"The surface of the table-land, or plateau, is covered with vegetation, and by climbing a high mountain-peak situated near one can look down upon a portion of it. Wild animals are to be seen, and, strange to relate, evidences of the existence of human beings. Only think of it! Perhaps for a thousand years—ay, much longer, this plateau has been in this very same condition of inaccessibility. What, then, is the character of its inhabitants? What manner of people are they? Why may they not be a relic of the race of primitive man? Possibly they may prove to be the missing link between man and the anthropoid ape. Who shall say?"

"You can understand, then, why I am anxious to enlist you in our cause, Mr. Reade. With your wonderful airship this remarkable nation in the air may be visited. Who shall tell what may be the results? The whole world of science will be aroused by this discovery."

Petrovitch's eyes shone like stars, and he grew very excited when Frank announced his willingness of visiting also the plateau.

"I am not disappointed in you, Mr. Reade," he declared. "I adjudged you a man of courage and enterprise. When will you be ready?"

"Perhaps in three weeks," replied Frank. "You may consider the matter settled, however. My word is my bond."

"Your word is all-sufficient, Mr. Reade," declared Petrovitch, warmly. "I will return at once to New York. When the airship is ready to start you can wire me, and I will meet you in Paris with the Princess Olga. We will then proceed to Tobolsk, or at least to Irkutsk. After that we can visit the elevated plateau."

"That will do very well," replied Frank Reade. "But would you not like to take a look at the plans of the new airship?"

"It will give me great pleasure," replied the scientist, with alacrity.

Frank led the way to his huge workshop, in the main room of which the airship was in process of construction.

Nicolas Petrovitch saw before him what appeared to be the hull of a light-draught ship, with graceful lines, and a sharp bow and narrow stern. At the stern of the ship was a projecting rod upon which was a large propeller, after the pattern of a steamer's screw, only vastly wider and deeper in the flanges.

This was about all that could be seen of the airship in her unfinished condition, but Frank Reade led the way to a heavy roll of charts upon a table.

"You have seen the hull of a ship," he

said. "Now, from the centre of the deck two uprights will be raised, to the top of which revolving helices will be applied. By means of these helices which are worked by the motor, the airship will be able to rise and maintain its equilibrium in the air.

"On the forward deck a wheel-house will be built, enclosed by thick glass. In it a lever-board will be placed, by means of which the rudder at the stern can be worked, the propeller managed, and the action of the helices controlled.

"There will be a deck-house amidships, and a large cabin aft. Just forward of the pilot-house an electric searchlight will be placed, capable of throwing a light fully two miles ahead. To avoid a jar when the ship descends, upon each side of the hull, at equal distances apart, there will be placed three large steel wings, twenty feet in breadth, six in total number, capable of easily folding up when the ship is in motion.

"This completes the general appearance of the airship. You will find, when she is completed, that she is a model of beauty, of elegance, and fine furnishing, such as you never set your eyes upon before."

"Petrovitch was delighted.

"Certainly I had no idea of the grandeur of your airship, Mr. Reade," he declared. "I expected to see an abridgment of a balloon, or something of that sort. I consider it the grandest invention on earth."

"Well, you are quite safe in that premise," agreed Frank, with a smile. "It is a great invention, and I hope I am not guilty of egotism in that statement. I shall hurry along its construction with all possible speed."

And so well did he keep his word that exactly three weeks from that day the big shop doors were opened, and out on to the ways in the yard the airship glided. She was finished, rigged, and even equipped with a large store of provisions, tools, and instruments, weapons, and all of the incidentals required for the trip to Asia. Nobody was in higher spirits than Barney and Pomp, Frank's Irish and negro servants, who had accompanied him on all his earlier trips.

The whole population of Readestown had turned out to see the "Meteor," as the airship was named, start upon her long trip.

The vast field about the works was filled with people, and all were ready to cheer.

Just as Frank Reade entered the yard, dressed in his neat uniform, an elderly gentleman with a white beard addressed him.

"Doctor Vaneyke!" cried Frank, joyfully. "I am glad to see you, my dear old friend."

"Did you think I was not coming?" asked the scientist.

"No," replied Frank. "Are you ready?"

"Oh, yes. I have had all my instruments for scientific uses carried aboard. So far as I can see, we are all ready to go."

"Very well, then," cried Frank. "All

aboard! Start the helices, Barney; stand by the wheel, Pomp."

Barney and Pomp jumped to do his bidding. The airship thrilled and trembled a moment, then a great cheer went up from the crowd as she sprang into the air.

Up she went a thousand feet, and then off on her eastward trip.

"It's good to see you, Doctor Vaneyke," declared Frank, as the town faded from view. "It's ages since we met."

"Very true," replied the doctor. "I have devoted much of my time of late to a study of prehistoric man. As soon as I heard that you were en route for Asia to look up a new race of people, of course I was caught with the idea."

"What is your opinion?" asked Frank. "Is M. Petrovitch labouring under an illusion, or does such a race of people actually exist as he tells about?"

"I see no reason for discrediting his story," declared the old doctor, and he proceeded to relate other instances of tribes dwelling in isolated places of the earth.

On and on floated the airship. Night came, and still she moved through the blue ether with a myriad of stars overhead, and the moon shedding silvery radiance across the deck.

Pomp and Barney were at the rail. The doctor and Frank were in reclining chairs by the cabin-door, enjoying fragrant cigars.

"When shall we reach New York?" asked the doctor.

"I think by to-morrow night," replied Frank.

"Then we ought to be in London three days later?"

"Oh, yes."

"And in Paris in another day?"

"Exactly."

"From there, what direction shall we take?"

"We shall fly over Russia and in a straight line for Siberia."

Far below, a multitude of bright lights were seen. They looked like a constellation against the earth's dark surface.

"What ebber am dat, Marse Frank?" asked Pomp.

"Why, it is a large city," replied Frank. "Chicago, I should say. We are making rapid progress, and shall certainly reach New York by to-morrow night."

"Oh, heavens, we are lost!"

The voice seemed to sound right by Frank Reade's shoulder.

"Did you speak, doctor?" he asked, sharply, turning at the same time.

"No," replied the scientist, in amazement. "I thought it was you."

Barney and Pomp had also heard the voice, and were equally amazed.

"Well, that's queer!" exclaimed Frank. "There certainly is nobody else aboard this ship. Ah——"

"I tell you, Arthur, my strength is giving out. I can hold on no longer."

"Don't give way, Walter. Hang on to the last."

Frank Reade and Dr. Vaneyke stood gazing at each other. The lips of neither had moved, yet the voices had sounded right on the airship's deck. What did it mean?

All waited for a repetition of the voices, and it came soon.

"Oh, Heaven! I can hold on no longer, Arthur. The ropes are cutting my hands. The balloon does not seem to descend."

Balloon! Frank Reade caught his breath quickly. In an instant all was explained.

"Now I understand it," he cried, excitedly. "Barney, shut off the propeller. Pomp, come with me."

Quick as a flash Frank sprang to the searchlight, and a flood of light shot out into the atmosphere.

The moon had been under a cloud for nearly half an hour. This was why the balloon in such close proximity to the airship had not been seen.

Brought within the focus of the searchlight's glare, however, the floating wreck of a huge balloon was descried, and to its shrouds two men were clinging.

"Hold on for a bit longer! Help is coming," shouted Frank, encouragingly.

Slowly and cautiously the "Meteor" approached the drifting balloon, until it was directly under it.

"Steady, now!" cried Frank Reade. "When I give the word, catch this rope, and make it fast to the rigging of your balloon."

"Ay, ay!" was the reply.

Pomp was an adept at throwing the lariat. He was selected to heave the rope up to the suspended men, and he made no blunder. The man called Arthur caught it, and in a moment he had knotted it into the netting of the balloon.

"Now slide down to the deck!" cried Frank.

Down the rope came the men, and, when both stood safe and sound on the "Meteor's" deck, Frank Reade cut the rope, and the balloon leaped up into space.

Both aeronauts came forward, and offered their hands to Frank Reade, thanking him for their rescue, and introducing themselves as Arthur Graham and Walter Bennett. They had been experimenting with their balloon, they explained, and were in danger of dropping to the earth owing to the envelope suddenly splitting and allowing the gas to escape.

Next day the "Meteor" descended on the outskirts of Buffalo, and the aeronauts alighted.

"Well, I wish you success, Mr. Reade!" both cried.

The "Meteor" shot up into the air, and once more went on its eastward way.

CHAPTER 2.

On Across the Atlantic.—A Ship on Fire.— Only Two Saved.—Attacked by Cossacks.

"ALL that day the "Meteor" held on its course. At nightfall, with a powerful glass, Frank sighted the lights of New York city.

"Will you stop in the metropolis, Frank?" asked Dr. Vaneyke.

"No," replied Frank. "I shall keep straight on across the Atlantic."

The airship passed over the great American metropolis, and was soon above the sea. Frank Reade went into his cabin, and Barney took charge of the deck.

The Celt had had it in for Pomp for a long while, and he believed that now his opportunity had come for the paying up of several old scores. There was a mischievous light in his eyes as he crept to the door of the pilot-house, and saw Pomp engaged in poring over the pages of a novel.

The Irishman found a rope in the cabin, and this he quickly stretched across the doorway, at a height of two feet above the threshold.

Then he went down to the galley and brought up a tub full of water. This he placed in the shadows, just in front of the door, and afterwards emptied a whole can of cayenne pepper into the water. Not satisfied with this he also placed ammonia, a can of mustard, and other ingredients in the tub.

"De jabers, that'll fix the blagyard," muttered Barney, with a chuckle. "Now for the springin' av the trap."

He waited a few moments, and then suddenly shouted:

"Pomp, ye naygur! Phwere are yez, anyway? Misther Frank wants yez in his cabin. Hurry up, loively now. Do yez hear?"

"Fo' shuah I hear," cried Pomp, suddenly springing up and dropping the book. "What am dat yo' want, F'ish?"

"Yer masther wants yez in his cabin," returned Barney. "Hurry up, ye black haythin, ye."

"Who am dat yo' call a haythin, F'ish?" spluttered Pomp.

"You, ye lank-sided, sun-burned lump av laziness," retorted Barney. "If yez would dare to come out av that loike a man, I'd engage to shpoil the face av yez."

"Jes' yo' wait dar one minnit, F'ish!" cried Pomp, excitedly. "I'll show yo' better dan to 'sult a gemman ob colour in dat a manne. Ki-yi! I'll jes' break yo' jaw, such as my name am Pomp!"

The excited and angry darkie made a dash out of the door to grab Barney. The sequel was a dismal one for him, but pleasing to Barney, who nearly split his sides with laughter.

Into the tub Pomp went head foremost. The pepper entered his eyes, and made him give a convulsive gasp. This brought a

torrent of the water down his throat with most unpleasant results.

It well-nigh choked him, and he crawled out of the tub in a state of mind and body beyond description. He went tearing round the deck like a madman.

"W'u'd yez luk at the naygur," howled Barney, with delight. "Bad cess to yez, ye black bit of ebony."

Smarting with the pain of his punishment Pomp lowered his head, and made a mad rush at his tormentor.

Barney scrambled to get out of the way, but he was too late. Pomp's head took him in the stomach, and then the laugh was on the other side. Barney howled with pain.

"Yo' jes' t'ink yo' am smaht for playin' tricks on dis coon, doan' yo'?" spluttered Pomp, triumphantly. "But yo' jes' am n't so smaht as yo' finks yo' is."

"Och hone, I'm kilt entirety!" howled Barney. "The naygur has kilt me stomach. Oh, bad cess to the haythin."

The racket, of course, reached the ears of Frank Reade and Dr. Vaneyke in the cabin, and the young inventor quickly appeared on deck, and put an end to the skylarking.

The "Meteor" was making good headway, and suddenly came out of a cloud, to show the heaving ocean far beneath. Frank Reade went to the rail to look over, and as he did so a thrilling sight caught his gaze.

"Do you see that, Vaneyke?" he cried. "It is fire. Yes, as sure as you live, it is a burning ship!"

"My soul! You are right," replied the doctor.

Both saw, far below on the ocean, a noble merchant ship in flames.

"We should be inhuman not to go to their aid!" said Frank. "Hey! Barney and Pomp, lower the airship at once! Stand by, doctor, until we can drop ropes over the side."

Frank Reade's orders were quickly obeyed, and the airship was sinking rapidly when there came a sudden lurid burst of flames from the depths of the ship's hold, then the air was rent with a terrific explosion.

There must have been a quantity of powder amongst the cargo, and this had blown up. Frank turned the searchlight down upon the scene of ruin. The sea was strewn with the blazing fragments of the wreck. A number of human forms were seen struggling in the water.

By Frank's orders down went the "Meteor" until she settled in the water, for she was so built as to be unsinkable so long as her hull remained intact. And as she came to rest on the waves Frank saw a drifting piece of plank, and to it clung two human beings. One was a man, and he supported a young girl in his arms, whose white face could be plainly distinguished even at that distance. Frank acted quickly then, and in an

incredibly short space of time the man and girl were dragged on board the airship.

Dr. Vaneyke hurried both of the castaways into the cabin and gave them restoratives, while Frank kept the "Meteor" cruising around among the floating debris looking for other unfortunates. But the two already rescued proved to be the sole survivors of the fearful catastrophe.

Not until the last burning timber had been extinguished, and a most thorough search made, did Frank Reade abandon the quest. Then he turned from the rail to meet Dr. Vaneyke and his two patients, completely restored, coming out of the cabin.

"I'm sorry to say that you are the only survivors," he said, as he advanced and extended his hand. "Allow me to congratulate you upon your narrow escape."

"And to you we owe our lives!" cried the stranger, warmly. "How can we ever repay you? And to whom are we indebted for this service?"

"I am Frank Reade."

"Ah! of course I have heard your name, and I am proud to make the acquaintance of so distinguished an inventor," was the reply. "I am Sir Edgar Maubrey, of Maubrey Towers, England, and this is my daughter, Alice. We were on our way to Quebec for a pleasure cruise in the merchant ship 'Swallow.' We were at dinner when the alarm was given. Flames at once burst up through the deck. Almost before anything could be done the explosion came, and the next I remember we were all in the water."

They went on talking in this strain for some time, and then Frank proceeded to show the baronet and his daughter over the airship, which was now once more sailing through the air.

"I never dreamed that such a wonder existed upon the face of the earth," declared Sir Edgar, when the tour of inspection was ended and they were seated in Frank's cabin.

"We are going direct to London," declared the young inventor. "We will set you down at your own door, Sir Edgar."

"That will suit me very well," replied the baronet, gracefully. "I shall be the envied of all Britain for having had the honour of a ride on such a wonderful airship."

All night long the "Meteor" held her swift flight over the tossing deep. At times the wind was boisterous, and once a gale was encountered. But Pomp took the "Meteor" up to a high altitude and passed over it.

The next morning the sun rose bright and clear, and Sir Edgar and his daughter were in ecstasies over the novelty of their position. All that day the "Meteor" kept to the eastward.

"If we are fortunate," declared Frank Reade that night, "we shall sight the Scilly Islands to-morrow at daybreak."

The prediction came true. At daybreak land was in view, and regret filled the hearts of Sir Edgar and his daughter that the journey, as far as they were concerned, was nearly over.

A day or so later Frank Reade, Dr. Vaneyke, Petrovitch, and the Princess Olga, who had joined the ship in Paris, sat by the rail, and studied the country below with powerful glasses.

The airship was now over Austria, or more properly Austria-Hungary. Thus far the weather had been perfect, but soon clouds formed in the sky, and rain fell. The "Meteor" was taken above the storm, however, but this was into an altitude so high that the air was raw and chilly, and all were glad to seek the comfort and warmth of the cabin.

The storm hung on for several days, so that little was seen of the country below, and by the time it had blown itself out, the "Meteor" was sailing over the land of the Cossacks.

Great plains, seeming almost illimitable in extent, stretched away into the distance. The verdure was of a peculiar vivid green, and the plains were threaded by various rivers and streams.

Flocks were seen grazing, and attended by groups of peasants. Huts in clusters formed apparently the abodes of these people.

In order that they might closely study the strange people, Frank caused the airship's speed to be abated.

Then a descent was made until within a few hundred feet of the plain, and as it slowly drifted along the shepherds fled from beneath it in dismay.

But a number of Cossacks, who were mounted, showed no signs of fear. Instead they started in pursuit of the "Meteor." Wild and barbaric they looked as, several hundred strong, they dashed madly after the airship, and sent a volley of shots up into the air.

"Be jabbers, jist give me a squint at the haythins!" cried Barney, lifting his rifle, which he had brought from the arms rack. "I'll shpoil the fun av one av thim."

"Jes' yo' gib me a chaine!" cried Pomp, likewise. "I'll make dem chickens t'ink it am de debbil what am aftah 'em."

Both would have fired but for Frank Reade.

"Hold up!" he cried, authoritatively. "Don't fire! They cannot harm us, so we may as well let them alone."

To avoid any possibility of trouble, Frank then sent the airship higher, and, putting on full speed, they quickly passed out of sight of the Cossacks, leaving them far behind on the plain.

Soon the plains all seemed to merge into elevated table-lands, or steppes. It was a picture well worth looking at. As far as the eye could reach these steppes extended,

Frank was trying to study out the distant country, looking for some sign of human habitation, when suddenly Petrovitch came out of the cabin.

"Ah, Mr. Reade, we shall soon reach Tobolsk and the mines," he declared. "Do you see that faint line of mountains on the horizon? Those are the Jablonoi Mountains."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Frank. "It is in those mountains, then, that we are to find Dolrouki?"

"The same!" replied Petrovitch.

"And this is the part of Siberia in which you spent your exile?"

"I was first sent to Irkutsk, then our gang of exiles was brought down into this region. It was while working here that I received my pardon."

"Ah! then we may expect to find Myles Zabriskie here also?"

"Exactly. I mistrust that Dolrouki is a slave-driver in these very mines. Perhaps poor Zabriskie may be under him."

"Would not that be unfortunate for him?"

"In the extreme. There is no indignity or hardship Dolrouki would not heap upon him."

"How many people are likely to be employed in these mines?" asked Frank.

"About three thousand," replied Petrovitch. "Look! you can just see the house-tops of Tobolsk now. That is the name of the town. We shall soon be there."

Frank studied the distant town with his glass. He saw that it resembled other towns in Russian territory. The buildings were built of logs and stone.

The others came upon deck now, and Olga clasped her hands and gazed with a strange yearning at the distant town.

"Shall I be able to see Myles at once?" she asked, turning to Frank Reade. "Or will it be necessary for me to remain unseen until after you have tried to make terms with Dolrouki?"

"Ah, I was just thinking of that," Frank declared. "I think it will be wiser and better for you to keep out of sight for a time."

She nodded her head with a little sigh.

The airship was soon among the mighty peaks of the Jablonoi range. The town that lay beneath them was seen to be but a small place. The dwellings were of logs and stone, and seemingly built more for protection from the cold winds of winter than for beauty of architecture. Streets ran from the square or plaza in the centre of the town like spokes from the hub of a wheel.

Up in the mountain-side above the town the mines of Tobolsk could be seen. Even the miners themselves were easily distinguishable, and a vast cloud of smoke arose from the smelting furnaces.

Of course, the appearance of the airship above the town created a tremendous excitement. People rushed out of the dwellings into the street.

"It seems to be quite a surprise to the natives," remarked Petrovitch.

"Somewhat," replied Frank Reade, anxiously. "I hardly think we can dare to descend among that crowd."

"It would scarcely be safe," ventured Petrovitch.

"Of course not. They would tear the airship to pieces."

"I hardly know what to do," went on the young inventor. "Of course, we have nothing in common with the natives. It is our prime purpose to find Dolrouki and Zabrinkie."

"Exactly," agreed Petrovitch.

"Are they likely to be in the mines?"

"I should say so."

"Then we may as well look there for them. We will give the town a wide berth, and go on to the mines."

Frank gave the order to Pomp in the engine-room, and the airship passed on over the town, the mines being at least a dozen miles further into the hills.

A railway connected the town with them, and as soon as the airship passed on in this direction, people could be seen rushing out on to the highways and boarding a train to follow on.

It was soon proved to our friends that they were in the neighbourhood of the mines. A vast excavation had been made into the mountain-side, and hundreds of half-clad, miserable-looking men were delving in the soil with pick and shovel.

All were unshaven and unkempt. Their garments were rags, and, indeed, they looked miserable beyond description. Two or three rough shanties were built along the mountain-wall.

Every avenue of exit from the place was held by armed guards, and a patrol of soldiers was always in evidence.

All on board the airship gazed down curiously enough upon the wretched slaves below. The airship had been seen by the guards, and, being reckoned a foe, the exiles were being driven to their huts like a flock of sheep before the bayonets of the soldiery.

Frank Reade watched the scene for a time, in doubt as to what it were best to do.

Some of the troops had been massed in a solid square just under the airship, and at the word of command fired a volley into the air, but the bullets rattled harmlessly against the steel sides of the "Meteor," but a moment later Frank caught sight of a battery of guns upon a spur of the mountain commanding the mines. He also saw, with a thrill, that these guns were being prepared for action. A tall officer in a scarlet uniform was excitedly directing the gunners. At sight of this officer both Petrovitch and Olga cried out, excitedly:

"There is Dolrouki!"

"Is that so?" cried Frank Reade, gazing critically at the tall officer.

The others rushed to the rail to get a look at Dolrouki. As they did so one of the guns was fired, and a shot went whizzing through the air not ten feet under the "Meteor's" hull.

"This won't do," declared Frank Reade.

"Be jabers, av that had hit us we w'u'd have been cold by this toime," answered Barney.

"I'd jes' like to draw a bead on dat ar' tall soger!" cried Pomp.

"No, no," interposed Petrovitch. "Don't kill him. We want to make use of him. We must capture him alive."

"Ay!" cried Frank Reade. "Don't kill Dolrouki. But mark him well. He must be captured."

Boom! another shot came hurtling through the air, and this one came nearer to the "Meteor."

"They will hit us yet," ventured Dr. Vaneyke, nervously. "Had we not better go higher up, Frank?"

"No," Frank said, coolly. "I mean to teach those chaps a lesson. Go down below and bring up some of those electric bombs and six of the chemical bombs," he added to Barney and Pomp.

The darkie and the Irishman soon appeared with the bombs, which seemed to be nothing more than curious-looking canvas bags. Frank Reade picked up a couple and went to the rail.

"Now for business!" he cried. "You will see them scatter now!"

He dropped one of the bombs over the rail. It struck the ground right in front of the squad of soldiers. The effect was terrific. There was a stunning explosion, and men were hurled right and left like puppets. With fearful confusion and terror the remnant of the squad broke and fled.

"W'u'd yez luk at the spalpeens run?" cried Barney.

"Jes' look at dat fo' a big victory!" shouted Pomp.

"Now for the chemical bombs," said Frank.

Boom—boom! A shot from one of the big guns just missed the airship's bow by a foot. A cry of terror went up from several. But Frank Reade was as cool as an icicle.

"Send the ship up, Pomp," he cried. "I want to get directly over those guns."

The airship moved forward, until it was right over the battery. Then Frank let one of the chemical bombs fall, and this time there was no explosion.

The bombs were an invention of Frank's, and were heavily charged with a peculiar chemical which had the effect of producing insensibility on those who came within twenty feet of its fumes. Down went the bomb. The gunners tried to dodge it; but it fell not ten feet from the tall officer, Dolrouki, and the next moment the gunners were seen

to throw up their arms and fall. Dolrouki lay flat upon the ground. Six of the foe were insensible.

"Now to make a prisoner of Dolrouki!" cried Frank. "Turn Switch 5, Pomp."

Pomp did as he was bidden, and the airship began rapidly to descend.

In a few moments it rested upon the ground at the deserted guns.

Frank had provided himself with a hammer and some steel files. With these he leaped from the airship's deck and quickly spiked the guns.

Then he approached the prostrate forms of the gunners, who were already beginning to recover from the drug. Quickly he slipped manacles upon the wrists of Dolrouki, and ordered Barney and Pomp to take him aboard.

"Look out!" cried Vaneyke. "The enemy are coming!"

Frank Reade sprang aboard the airship just as a hundred armed men came up the slope to the relief of the battery.

"Quick, boys!" he shouted to Barney and Pomp. "There's no time to lose."

But neither of the two faithful servitors needed any bidding. They ran forward as rapidly as possible, carrying the form of Dolrouki between them.

Not a moment too soon did they reach the airship's deck. With a wild yell the attacking party topped the eminence, and fired a volley at the airship. But in a few seconds the "Meteor" was beyond the reach the bullets.

"What is the best plan now?" asked Frank, turning to Petrovitch. "What would you advise doing with our prisoner?"

"The desirable thing," declared Petrovitch, "is to induce him to make a confession which will clear Zabrinskie of the charge against him."

"Does he speak English?" Frank asked.

"He is a fine linguist," replied Petrovitch. "He speaks English, French, and German fluently."

"That will make it easier," declared Frank. "Now, my instructions are that both you and Princess Olga keep out of his sight. I will endeavour to accomplish the purpose you desire."

Petrovitch vanished into his cabin, and Frank went up to Dolrouki, to whom Dr. Vaneyke had been administering a restorative.

"Where am I?" Dolrouki cried, hoarsely, in Russian. "What is the meaning of this?"

"Easy, my fine fellow," said Dr. Vaneyke, soothingly. "Listen to reason. You're a prisoner, and must keep quiet. It will be to your interests to do so."

"Prisoner!" exclaimed Dolrouki, in English. "Heavens! you are all Englishmen."

"No, not English," replied the doctor.

"But you speak the language?"

"We are Americans."

"Americans?" gasped Dolrouki. "What have you brought me here for? Let me down to the earth again. What harm have I done you?"

"What harm have you done me?" replied Frank. "You fired upon us and tried to kill us. But we do not propose to hurt you if you will only be reasonable and accede to our requests."

Dolrouki's manner changed.

"Well," he said, more calmly. "I suppose I shall have to submit, as I am your prisoner. Do you hold me for a ransom?"

"No," replied Frank. "Upon one consideration you are a free man again."

Dolrouki's eyes gleamed.

"What is it?"

"Do you know one Myles Zabrinskie?"

Dolrouki's face turned as black as a thundercloud, and he hissed:

"He is a dog! I know him well. He poisoned the mind of the girl I would have married."

"Ah! what did you do to even up the score? Got him exiled, eh?"

Dolrouki looked at Frank in blank amazement.

"Can you tell me where Zabrinskie is now?" asked the young inventor.

"In those very mines. I am one of his overseers, and I take care to make his life miserable."

"Very well; then you ought to be satisfied. Having had your revenge, it is time that you called off your dogs. By so doing you will save your life."

"What do you mean?" asked Dolrouki, with some surprise.

"I mean this," replied Frank, sternly: "you know as well as I do that Myles Zabrinskie is absolutely innocent of the charge brought against him."

"Look here," said Dolrouki, craftily; "tell me plainly what you want."

"Very well," replied Frank. "I will do so. I want from you a confession of that plot against the Czar's life, in which you said that Zabrinskie was involved. You can furnish the evidence to clear him."

Dolrouki gazed at Frank, blankly. For a moment he could not answer.

"Am I dreaming?" he muttered at length. "You demand the proof of Zabrinskie's innocence. That would bring him back from Siberia to St. Petersburg, and he would marry her. Do you think I am a fool?"

And he laughed scornfully.

"But that will save your life," said Frank.

"Oh, you mean to kill me, then? Very well. I will die as a man should."

"Listen!" said Frank, sternly. "You shall give me the evidence to prove Zabrinskie's innocence, or I will cause you to be thrown from this airship to the ground!"

Dolrouki maintained a dogged silence. Frank motioned to Barney and Pomp.

"Lead the prisoner to the rail," he declared. "Stand ready to throw him overboard. Take off his manacles."

Barney and Pomp were quick to obey. It was a frightful distance to the earth, and made even an inexperienced head dizzy to look down. But Dolrouki proved that he was a man of iron nerve. He stood at the airship's rail and unflinchingly faced his death-ordeal. Barney and Pomp held him.

"Once more, Dolrouki," cried Frank, "will you confess?"

"Never!" gritted the villain. "You can but kill me once."

"Ready!" said Frank, grimly. "One—two——"

Not a muscle of Dolrouki's face quivered. He seemed preparing for the mighty drop earthward, and did not betray terror. Frank was beaten, for, of course, he had no idea of throwing the villain overboard. Dolrouki recognised the advantage he held. If hurled to death, then the evidence of Zabrinski's innocence was lost for ever. Frank knew that he must devise some other way to extort the confession from him.

"Take him below, Barney," he commanded. "Put him in the forward state-room and connect the door with the dynamos."

"Ay, sor!" replied Barney; and he, with Pomp's assistance, led Dolrouki away. The villain seemed elated with the victory.

When he had disappeared below Petrovitch and Olga came out of the cabin. They were deeply disappointed when they learned of Frank's failure to wring a confession from the villain.

"But he may come to time yet," the young inventor declared. "We will keep him prisoner a little while, and, any way, I learned one important fact—Zabrinski is in these mines."

"Is that true?" cried Olga, joyfully. "Oh, then we can rescue him."

"I had thought of that," said Frank. "I think I will let Dolrouki remain with us while we look for Zabrinski."

Olga was delighted with this plan, and Frank accordingly caused the airship to settle until it was within a few hundred feet of the earth, then it floated across the mines to the long row of cabins used by the labouring exiles. These men had not given way to terror so completely as had the soldiers. As the airship approached, many of them came out of the huts. At a word from Frank, Petrovitch leaned over the rail and shouted to them in the Russian tongue.

"We are friends!" he cried. "You have nothing to fear from us."

"Have you come to deliver us?" came back the reply.

"We have!" replied Petrovitch. "You

are all free. Strike to the eastward, and you will find freedom."

A wild shout of joy went up at this.

"It is a good act to set these poor slaves free," declared Petrovitch to Frank. "Only think, the majority of them are of the noblest blood in Russia," and once more Petrovitch leaned over the rail.

"A word with you, friends!" he cried.

"Ay!" cried several in chorus.

"Do you know Myles Zabrinski?"

"We know him well," was the reply. "He is our comrade."

"Where is he?"

"He comes this way now."

Petrovitch turned and saw a tall, wretchedly clad but handsome man approaching. In an instant he recognised him.

"Mr. Reade!" he cried, "there is my friend—there is Myles Zabrinski!"

Frank immediately lowered the airship until it was within ten feet of the earth. Several hundred exiles crowded about in wonderment. Petrovitch leaned over the rail, and cried:

"Myles! I have kept my word. I have come back to save you!"

A gasping cry escaped Zabrinski.

"My soul!" he cried. "Is that you, Petrovitch?"

"Of course it is."

By Frank's orders the rope ladder was lowered, and quickly Zabrinski went on board. He embraced his old friend, and shook hands with all the others, except Olga, who was in the cabin.

"You have changed, Myles," declared Petrovitch. "I should hardly know you. They have worked you hard."

"My life has been a hard one," declared the exile, gloomily. "You know my old foe, Dolrouki, is one of the drivers here. He has done all in his power to make me miserable."

"Indeed?" rejoined Petrovitch. "Well, now you can do something to make him miserable."

"What do you mean?"

"He is on board this ship."

Zabrinski was astounded.

"On board this ship!" he muttered. "What is he here for?"

"We intend to extort from him a confession which will prove your innocence."

A cry escaped Zabrinski's lips.

"Petrovitch, my friend," he cried, wildly, "I cannot thank you enough! You are my best and dearest friend."

Just at that moment Olga came on deck. The effect was thrilling. For a moment the two lovers stood gazing at each other. Then, with a wild, rapturous cry, the Princess Olga sprang to the arms of the man she loved above all others. It was a happy reunion, and brought tears to their eyes. Mutual explanations followed, and then the "Meteor" rose high in the air. There was no

reason for remaining near the mines any longer, so Frank set a course eastward. Dr. Vaneyke met him on the companion-stairs.

"Now that we have them all on board," he said, "we can kill two birds with one stone. While we are waiting for Dolrouki to come to time, why not go on to that elevated plateau described by Petrovitch?"

"That is what I intend to do," replied Frank. "You may make preparations accordingly."

"Good! I am glad of that!" cried the doctor, joyfully.

All that day and night the airship kept on its flight. Then, with the breaking of the day, a wonderful scene was spread below on the earth's surface. The mountainous region had disappeared, and as far as the eye could reach the desert steppes lay stretched out. All were on deck at an early hour watching the spectacle. Olga and Myles Zabriskie were together, and seemed the happiest of mortals. Myles had cast off his ragged clothes, and was dressed in a neat-fitting suit furnished him by Petrovitch.

Frank Reade, Dr. Vaneyke, and Petrovitch were busily engaged in discussing the topography of the country, when a warning cry came from Pomp. He set the "Meteor's" wheel and sprang out on deck.

CHAPTER 3.

In the Grip of the Sand Storm.—Saved by Frank Reade.—Among the Strange People of the Plateau.—Dolrouki's Confession.

"WHAT is the matter, Pomp?" cried Frank Reade, springing forward. "What has happened?"

"Oh, Marse Frank!" cried the terrified darkie. "Jes' yo' cast your eyes ober dar to de eastward. What am dat drefful big black cloud?"

It was seen at a glance that there was good ground for Pomp's terror. On the horizon line was a strange funnel-shaped cloud which was whirling and revolving like a water-spout in the ocean. It seemed to be approaching with fearful velocity, and every moment grew larger and more alarmingly distinct.

"What is it?" gasped Petrovitch, in horror.

"It—it looks like a sand-storm," ventured Dr. Vaneyke.

"That's what it is," declared Frank, positively. "If it strikes the 'Meteor,' it will be the end of us."

"My soul!" gasped Petrovitch. "Had we not better descend?"

"On the contrary, we must go up," declared Frank. "It might bury us twenty feet deep if we went down."

"Fo' de sakes, Marse Frank!" cried Pomp, in terror, "what eber shall I do?"

Frank made no answer, but sprang past Pomp into the pilot-house. He pressed an electric signal to Barney in the engine-room to put on the full force of the dynamos. Then he quickly set the switch-lever of the helices on the keyboard, so that the airship began to shoot upwards with great rapidity. Looking forward through the pilot-house window Frank saw the sand-cloud coming across the steppes with the speed of a race-horse. There was no time to lose.

"Pomp," he cried, "clear the deck! Make everybody go below. Then come in the pilot-house and fasten the door."

Pomp rushed out to obey orders. Then he removed everything portable on the deck or lashed it, and a few seconds later rushed into the pilot-house and closed the door. He was not a moment too soon. The "Meteor" had been going upwards like a rocket. But the higher it went the nearer it seemed to be drawn to the mighty vortex of whirling sand. The air was filled with flying dust, the sound of many thunders was vibrating through the atmosphere, and nothing could be seen of the earth below.

Up, up went the "Meteor." Thus far the airship had received no particular damage. It seemed to have got above the whirling maelstrom, but was yet in a flying cloud of sand which probably formed the top of the sand-spout. But the sand was piled up on the decks in great heaps.

And now, of a sudden, a strange, jarring feeling was experienced. The machinery seemed strangely affected. There was a buzzing and a crunching sound, and then a sinking sensation. Frank Reade sprang forward and examined the switch-board. Then he glanced up at the helices.

"We are lost!" he gasped. "We must be more than two thousand feet in the air, and now the helices are refusing to work. They are clogged with sand. We are falling."

Pomp was beside himself with terror.

"Oh, fo' de law' sakes, Marse Frank!" he cried, wildly. "Am we dead suah fo' to git killed dis 'ar way?"

"It looks like it," said Frank, grimly.

And it certainly did look like it. It required all the force of the dynamos to make the helices revolve even slowly. To take the strain from them, Frank set the wings at the airship's sides. But this was of little avail. The airship continued to sink, and, of course, every moment became deeper involved in the sand.

For a time Frank Reade was in perplexity and dismay. But he had been in many a tight box before, and never yet had he lacked for a way out of it. An idea came into his fertile brain. He sprang down into the cabin through a side stairway, and came back with a couple of bombs in his hands.

"It is our only hope," declared Frank, desperately. "May Heaven help us!"

He threw open the pilot-house window, and with a quick movement pitched one of the bombs far over the airship's rail.

There was the wait of a brief second. Then there came a tremendous, stunning explosion, followed by a sound like the thunder of many waters. The sand came pelting down upon the airship's deck in great heaps. There was a tremendous rocking and swaying, and through the darkness there came a rift of light. Blue sky was overhead. A wild cheer escaped Pomp's lips. Barney came tumbling up from the engine-room.

"Phwat iver has happened, Misther Frank?" he cried, in amazement. "Shure, I haven't dared to l'ave the dynamos afore."

"Don' yo' see fo' yo'self, I'ish?" cried Pomp. "Look out dar. It am de biggest sand-storm yo' eber see'd. But fo' Marse Frank breaking it up wif dat bomb yo' an' I w'u'd 'ave been wid de angels afore dis."

Below the airship all was now a heaving, tossing mass of falling sand. This settled very quickly, and then the plain below was seen to be spread with a mighty heap of white sand. The "Meteor" was not a thousand feet from the earth, and the helices were struggling in their clogged revolutions.

The airship was settling, and Frank knew that a descent would have to be made. He was ready and anxious for this, for he feared that great damage would be done to the grooves in the helices by the sand. All now crowded out of the cabin, and gazed with dismay at the airship's deck piled high with sand, in many places as high as the rail. It was this tremendous ballast which was overcoming the suspensory power of the helices.

"It means quite a serious delay to us," declared Frank Reade. "Every bit of our delicate machinery has got to be overhauled and cleaned. It will be no slight task, I assure you. This sand has penetrated, I have no doubt, to every part of the ship."

The "Meteor" slowly settled down to the earth, and, as soon as it touched the plain, active work was at once begun to clean up. As Frank had predicted, this was no small task. The sand was persistent and clinging, and had penetrated to every part of the vessel. Every bit of the delicate machinery had to be overhauled and cleaned.

Everybody retired at an early hour, for they were weary with toil. It was Pomp's watch for the first half of the night.

Thus far they had not been troubled by any human being. At night the jackals and many wild beasts came howling about, but they could do no harm. Pomp was usually quite plucky, but the present night was a dark one, he was alone upon the deck, and the vast Asiatic wilderness was about him. Pomp glanced askance into the shadows of the plain, and as he caught the gleam of some wild beast's eyes, or heard its savage growl, he would shiver.

"G'way dar, yo' nasty beast!" he exclaimed. "Fo' jes' hari a cent I'd put a bullet froo yo' dirty carkiss, I would!"

Suddenly the darkie came to a halt. The wild beasts began to scatter with yelps of terror. Then a swinging light appeared upon the plain.

Nearer it drew to the airship, and Pomp gazed at it with a strange sense of terror stealing over him. It did not occur to him, singularly enough, to arouse any of his companions. The light became more distinct, and then from the distance there came a faint shout. This was succeeded by a rumbling sound which increased in volume every moment.

"De debbil am a-comin', fo' suah!" muttered Pomp.

Then a bright idea occurred to him. He sprang into the bow of the airship and turned on the searchlight, and the result was a thrilling disclosure to Pomp.

Almost at the limit of the searchlight's rays the darkie saw revealed a body of horsemen. They had been galloping swiftly towards the airship, and evidently had not suspected its presence until Pomp turned on the searchlight. The glimmer which the darkie had seen came from a lantern carried on a pole in advance of the horsemen, to guard against pitfalls.

The sudden flashing up of the searchlight had a tremendous effect upon the horsemen. They came to a sudden stop, overpowered with fright and surprise.

They were a roving band of Koords, clad in scarlet uniforms and armed to the teeth.

"Golly!" gasped the astounded darkie. "I'se done put my foot in it now. If I hadn't been a fool nigger, I'd let dem rapsallions have gone by."

"Begorra, that's throe enough," exclaimed a bantering voice in Pomp's rear. "I allus sed yez wus a idjit, anyway, ye misfit monkey!"

It was Barney, who had just come up to relieve Pomp for the rest of the night. Pomp forgot his scare and the fact that a band of Koords were within the scope of the searchlight in his indignation at the insult.

"Shut up, I'ish," he retorted. "If I am a fool you am a heap sight bigger one."

"Be jabbers, don't yez say that to me!" flashed Barney.

"I'll jes' do something mo' dan say it, I'll make yo' feel it."

Barney dodged a blow made at him by Pomp. The coloured gentleman, very much excited, overreached his mark, and his fist accidentally struck a push-button in the wall.

In an instant there was a fearful din aboard the airship. The push-button connected with several big alarm-gongs, and it was Frank's orders that these were never to be rung except in a case of the greatest emergency.

The din was terrific.

"Be jabbers, now yez are in a scrape," cried Barney, holding his sides and roaring with laughter. "Yez will get the sack for that, an' no reckymindation——"

He did not finish the sentence.

Quick as a flash Pomp lowered his head and dived at Barney's stomach. The next moment the hilarious Celt collapsed on the deck, feeling both sick and sorry.

"What does all this mean?" cried a stern voice at that moment. Both Barney and Pomp were on their feet in an instant facing Frank Reade.

The alarm-gong had brought everybody from the cabin in hot haste. Dr. Vaneyke and Petrovitch were behind Frank. Olga was up and dressed in the cabin, for it was feared that deadly peril was at hand. Myles Zabriskie now also appeared.

The band of Koords had recovered from their first terror, and now were riding towards the airship. Frank saw that quick action must be made. The danger was more imminent, as the airship could not be raised because the helices had not yet been adjusted.

"Quick!" cried the young inventor. "Every man arm himself."

Barney sprang to a rack and took down rifles, and in a moment every man was armed with repeaters. Then Frank rushed into the bow of the airship.

The Koords, swinging their sabres, came riding down at headlong speed. When two hundred yards distant they fired a volley; then came on again with ear-splitting yells.

"Now, boys," cried Frank, "give it to 'em hot and heavy!"

The defenders of the airship cheered and opened fire, and a dozen saddles were empty in a trice. Horses fell and riders were thrown. Others stumbled over them, and the charging division split. The uninjured quickly withdrew out of range.

"Will they return to the attack?" asked Dr. Vaneyke. "It was a serious repulse."

"They may," said Frank, cautiously. "They will probably wait for daylight, however."

Then there was a babel of sounds, the excited jabbering of many voices, suddenly succeeded by the clatter of hoofs, which every moment grew less distinct, until they finally died out of hearing altogether on the plain. Frank decided to lose no time in getting the "Meteor" into the air, and set to work at once upon the helices.

As the storage jars were quite empty of water, it was decided to proceed to the base of the table-land and fill them from a large spring which was seen to exist there. Just as dawn was breaking the "Meteor" rose and cleared the edge of the cliff. Rising to an elevation of two hundred feet above the surface of the plateau, Frank allowed it to glide along at a moderate speed.

In this way the country could be examined to perfection. And wonderful sights were in store. The vegetation was rich and of a dark green; the forests were of maple, beech, and fir, with a few pines here and there.

Presently a high mountain rose in the airship's path. Frank gave the lever a turn and sent the airship above its summit. Beyond this mountain the real life of the elevated kingdom was spread before them. As far as the eye could reach were rich, fertile plains, diversified by purling streams and studded with gleaming lakes of water.

And far down on the plain was a city, of so strange and unique a character that our adventurers gazed upon it spellbound.

And now ludicrous incidents occurred. Suddenly a man of strange dress and appearance darted from a covert in the mountain-side, where he had been watching a flock of goats. He turned a frightened, pallid face up to the airship, and then fled.

Dr. Vaneyke and Petrovitch fastened their gaze through their glasses upon him.

"At last!" cried Petrovitch, excitedly. "I believe Darwin is to be vindicated. It certainly looks like the missing link between man and the ape."

"I verily believe it," muttered the doctor. "I have never seen a human being of that type before."

"Nor I," agreed Frank Reade.

The man was of medium size, with well-developed muscles and a white skin. At least such of it as could be seen was white, much of his body being covered with long black hair.

He wore no clothing save a mantle over his shoulders and a cloth hanging from his waist and reaching to his knees. His face was seen to be not devoid of intelligence but with strange-looking features. The nose was short and set deep in the face, the eyes deep and wild, the mouth large, the chin receding, and the teeth long, the eye-teeth like the incisors of the canine, lapping outside of the lower jaw, and giving the face a strange expression.

There was a great profusion of hair upon the nondescript's body, and Petrovitch declared that the strange man's feet were not feet, but counterparts of his hands. The two scientists were in their glory. With note-books and pencil, they were jotting down all the points of scientific interest and importance, while the airship slowly glided down to the city on the plain.

As this city was approached it presented a strange spectacle. The houses were simply two high walls of stone, with logs across the top from one wall to the other, forming a floor. Then round this floor another wall of stone was laid. The floor was covered with skins, and in dry weather the family lived and slept practically on the roof in the outer

air. The city was a large one, covering certainly several square miles.

The streets were narrow, and laid out in bewildering order, more like the intricate mazes of a labyrinth.

At sight of the airship the people of this strange kingdom seemed thrown into consternation and fright. They could be seen running hither and thither, and the beating of tom-toms, or skin drums, reached our friends' hearing.

The airship settled down in the very centre of the primitive city, and the people made no attack, nor did they venture near it.

On the contrary, they seemed to regard it with fear, and retreated in a multitude to the side of a hill.

Not one of the lot could be induced to come near the airship, but the scientists could hear their voices, and they very soon decided that these strange people were possessed of a distinct language. While it was of a low form, it was nevertheless a language.

"This will be a mighty discovery in the interests of science," declared Petrovitch. "Only think of it! We have found a type of the primitive man who has not changed his habits or customs in thousands of years."

"It is truly a valuable discovery," agreed Frank. "But why not try to make friends with the natives? They don't seem at all aggressive."

A gangway was lowered and the two scientists disembarked. Frank and Barney accompanied them, armed with rifles for their protection. Pomp remained aboard the airship.

The strange dwellers in the elevated city viewed the approach of their strange visitors with a mixture of curiosity and fear. Frank saw that they were armed with rude weapons of stone and wood.

The young inventor advanced, holding up his hands as a token of peace, and he also made signs with his head to indicate an amicable spirit. For a time the primitive people held back, but presently several, more courageous than the others, advanced, and spoke to Frank in their unintelligible tongue. By a sign language, which he often used among strange people, Frank asked them how long they had lived on the plateau.

The strange men shook their heads. Then one of them indicated the sands beneath their feet, and shook this head again more vigorously.

"He means that their ancestors have lived here more years than there are grains of sand beneath his feet," said Frank, in explanation, to the two savants.

"There is no doubt of that," agreed Dr. Vaneyke.

"Begorra, I should think they'd have invented some better kind av house," said Barney, scratching his head. "Phwy, yez

w'u'dn't dare to ask an Irish bog-throtter to siape in one av thim dens."

"Well, you see, they have never yet developed a great genius like Frank Reade," returned Dr. Vaneyke, with a laugh.

"No, nor they niver will, be jabers, in any counthry," affirmed Barney, honestly.

"You are complimentary, Barney," said Frank, smiling. "I must return thanks for that elegant compliment."

"Don't mention it, sor," replied Barney, doffing his hat. "It's not a bit more than ye deserve."

The primitive people had been watching Barney intently, and now at his comical actions and speech they burst into uproarious laughter.

"They certainly have a sense of humour," declared Petrovitch.

"Well, Barney, there's a compliment for you," declared Frank, with a roar of laughter.

Everybody laughed now, and this did more to break down the reserve of the plateau dwellers than anything else. Indeed, it disappeared entirely. They came forward in a body and surrounded our adventurers, who made them a few presents, and did everything in their power to reassure them, so that the scientists might be free to go amongst them and complete their investigations.

* * * * *
Meanwhile a strange illness had overtaken the prisoner Dolrouki, and, in spite of what Dr. Vaneyke did to relieve the man's suffering while the airship stayed on the plateau, he seemed to be slowly sinking.

In all his experience Vaneyke had never come across anything like this malady, and although he gave the stricken man every possible attention he had to confess that he was perplexed as to what remedies to apply. No doubt, the disease was one confined to that part of the world, and very rare, for even Dolrouki himself could tell the doctor nothing concerning it that would guide him to a satisfactory treatment.

But the malady had one good result, for, fearing that he was about to die, Dolrouki wrote out a complete confession of his plot which had caused Myles Zabriskie's exile, and absolutely exonerated the one time student from all blame.

Everyone was delighted with this turn of events. The scientists hastily brought their investigations to a close, and a start was made for Russian soil, it being Frank's intention to go to St. Petersburg, there to establish Zabriskie's innocence.

The days passed, and the "Meteor" winged its way over various tracts of country, until at length the Russian line was reached. Siberia, with its exiled thousands, was left behind.

One morning, Pomp reported to Frank that they were over a big city.

"I done fink it am de place we want," declared the darkie.

Frank went up on deck. St. Petersburg, the Russian metropolis, lay beneath them. Myles Zabriskie and Olga were at the rail, happy in the realisation that they were home once more, never again to roam.

Frank alighted in a huge square, and an arrangement was made with the authorities for the vessel to remain there several days.

Then Barney and Pomp, as armed guards, patrolled the deck, and kept the curious crowd at bay, while all the others went off to attend to the business of obtaining a free pardon for Zabriskie.

Dolrouki lived to appear before a police bureau and exonerate Zabriskie. The happy young Russian, with Olga, was then domiciled in Petrovitch's house to make preparations for establishing a home of his own.

Nothing now remained but for the voyagers to return home, but the day before the start was to have been made Dr. Vaneyke appeared before Frank with a suggestion, which completely altered all the young inventor's arrangements. This suggestion was that, instead of going home at once, Frank should steer for the South Pole, and enable the learned scientist to learn up several important matter concerning the ice region which had been under discussion for some time in the society which the doctor represented. And, ever ready to further the cause of scientific exploration, Frank agreed to Vaneyke's suggestion, and turned the "Meteor" in the direction of the Antarctic regions, where, although he knew it not, some amazing adventures awaited him and his friends.

CHAPTER 4.

Imprisoned in the Ice.—Captured by Barbarians.—The "Meteor" to the Rescue.

FAR down in the Antarctic Ocean a good ship was battling with heavy seas and a head-wind. For weeks the whaler "Albatross" had been trying to make headway against the vigorous norther which constantly headed her off.

But a few weeks more remained for them to get into northern seas before the winter would set in and cut off all chance of escape. Captain Hardy had spent one winter among the ice and snow of the Antarctic, and had no desire to spend another.

The ship was loaded down with whale-oil, and pecuniarily the cruise bade fair to be a tremendous success. But provisions were getting low, and to be nipped in the ice again meant a horrible fate—nothing short of starvation.

Realising this it was little wonder that Captain Hardy paced the deck of his ship anxiously and studied the northern sky.

"Well, Wallis," he cried, in his bluff way, "it still blows, and, by Neptune, it looks likely to keep on! We can't make seaway in such a wind. What are we going to do?"

Jack Wallis, the mate, a tall, handsome young fellow with resolute blue eyes and Saxon complexion, was not thinking of his own safety just at that moment so much as of the peril of a certain very charming young lady on board—no other than Lucille Hardy, the captain's daughter, who had persuaded her father to allow her to come on the trip.

"We must bend every sail!" the captain declared, when Wallis answered his question only by a shake of his head. "Unless we get out of here this week it is winter quarters, and——"

He finished the sentence with a gesture that spoke plainly enough of the peril he knew existed. But every day the wind grew stiffer, and the "Albatross" laboured harder.

Day by day the vessel lost headway. Then one day the black clouds shut in from the north, and there came an ice-storm the like of which they had never seen before.

There was little use to attempt to face the wind now. All they could do was to keep the vessel steady and look out for a collision with drift-ice.

The nights were long sieges, with those on watch trying to keep the ship from being stove in. The days were rigid battles against the careering blasts.

Then the sun disappeared below the horizon. The Antarctic night had begun. There was no longer any hope of reaching northern waters that year. In a remarkably brief space of time the tossing, turbulent sea had become a solid mass of pack-ice.

And in the midst of this, her timbers grinding and wrenching with the strain, lay the "Albatross." But soon the ice-pack became motionless, as the fearful cold contributed to make it solid.

Thus fixed in her icy bed the "Albatross" was to remain for seven long, dreary months.

It was by no means a pleasant outlook. Yet the crew proceeded to make the best of it. The rations were carefully reckoned up. It was found that only with the most frugal indulgence would they last until spring. Even then, however, it was remembered that after the ice-pack should break up it would be three months before they could hope to reach a port. Therefore the outlook was serious indeed.

Added to this was the almost absolute certainty of sickness. Scurvy already threatened various members of the crew.

It was a common conviction that the only hope of escape consisted in clinging to—

gether, and this they did. There were no mutiny, no recriminations, no quarrels. It was a common cause, and life was its stake.

Soon the Antarctic winter, with all its fearful rigours, had set in. But they were quite comfortable aboard the ship, grouping about the furnace by the light of the oil-lamps.

Outside the cold was at times so severe as to have almost precluded a human being living in the open air a moment.

At times, however, the thermometer would go up with a rush, and the air become quite mild. When this occurred hunts were organised, seals were plentiful, though rather difficult to hunt, and Arctic geese sometimes put in an appearance.

The party were getting along amazingly well, when one day a fearful catastrophe occurred.

Captain Hardy and Jack Wallis proposed to go on a seal hunt four miles away towards the open sea. They took two of the seamen—Jerry Mains and Adolph Sturgeson—with them. This left Second Mate Albert Stearms and six seamen aboard the craft, and, of course, Lucille.

Arrived at the sealing grounds, the first catastrophe occurred.

A seal was lanced by Sturgeson very near the edge of the pack. The creature was killed, as the sailor believed; but, as he ventured near it, suddenly it turned and attacked him.

Before Sturgeson could get out of the way it had fastened one of its tusks through the calf of his leg. He was held a prisoner, and the agony was so intense that he shrieked for aid.

Jerry Mains was the nearest, and, seeing his companion in such deep trouble, he at once started for him. Out over the pack he ran.

The seal, still hanging to its victim, was backing to the edge of the pack. A moment more and he would glide into the water.

Mains reached the spot quickly, and with a single blow he killed the seal, and then grasped Sturgeson's hands.

But at that moment a section of ice upon which they were suddenly snapped and broke away from the main pack and drifted out into the black water. All might have been well even then had it not been that there were huge, top-heavy peaks on the ice-floe which caused it to become unbalanced.

It rocked violently, and then, with a mighty vortex of waters, keeled over and turned under-side up, the heavy part of the berg sinking.

An awful cry of horror escaped Captain Hardy and Jack Wallis.

"Heaven, they are lost for ever!" cried the young mate.

This was certainly true. The two unfor-

tunate men never rose. The bed of the deep Antarctic was their final resting-place.

There was no more seal hunting that day, and back towards the ship Hardy and Wallis started. But as they came in sight of the "Albatross" Captain Hardy remarked a peculiar circumstance.

"That is queer!" he exclaimed. "There is no smoke from the galley pipes. What does it mean?"

"They cannot have let the fire go out!" cried Jack.

The two men exchanged startled glances, and they pressed forward as hurriedly as possible.

And as they drew nearer the ice-bound ship no one came out to greet them. No one answered Jack's hail. All was silent as death.

"What is the matter with them?" cried Captain Hardy. "Why on earth don't they answer?"

Forward they pushed rapidly. When twenty yards from the ship Jack Wallis paused with an awful cry of terror.

"Look!" he shrieked.

There, about the ship's gangway, the snow had been trampled, and it was a crimson colour—the colour of blood.

Over the rail Jack Wallis went. And there upon the ship's deck he saw the rigid figure of a man frightfully mutilated and frozen stiff in the bitter air.

"Dead!" he exclaimed, in hollow tones. "It is Martin Jones! He has been murdered!"

Captain Hardy reeled towards the cabin door. His face was chalky white.

"Lucille!" he gasped.

The same thought was in Jack Wallis's mind. He followed at once.

There by the galley fire, which was out, lay the stark and stiff forms of three more of the crew.

But where were the other two and Lucille?

"Mark Vane and Alvan Bates, with Lucille, are missing!" declared the excited captain. "What can have become of them?"

"There is but one theory."

"What?"

"They have been taken away as prisoners."

"But by whom?"

"How can I tell? See! the ship has been ransacked and many things carried away."

"You are right."

"I have an idea."

"What is it?"

"Below us lies the great continent. I fancy it is inhabited by various tribes of savages who are hostile. They have come out on to the pack hunting, and have found the ship."

"Heaven! and they have taken Lucille away captive?"

"Yes."

For a moment tears of agony streamed down Captain Hardy's face. Then he grasped Jack's hand.

"My boy," he said, in agony, "it is a fearful blow. Life is sped for me now. The 'Albatross' will never see home again!"

"Don't give up."

"How can I keep heart? How can we ever go back, even if we can rescue Lucille?"

Jack Wallis's voice rang out at clarion pitch:

"I tell you we shall rescue Lucille, if we have to follow those wretches to the very heart of the Antarctic continent itself!"

"Brave boy!" cried Captain Hardy. "But will the ship be here? Can we find our way back?"

"We have our bearings. But I hope that we may overtake the wretches before they have gone very far."

"Then let us be off."

"At once!"

Leaving the ship the two desperate men set out upon the trail, which was a broad and easy one to follow.

The air had moderated very much. Indeed, there was a faint mist creeping up from the sea. The barbarians left huge footprints in the snow, and it was from these that Captain Hardy drew his deductions.

"I tell you they are literal giants!" he declared. "No doubt they are fearful fighters."

"Yet they cannot, one of them, stop a rifle-shot without getting sick," said Jack.

"You are right there."

On through the snow for hours the two men followed the track.

All that day and the next they followed it. Happily they had taken the precaution to bring eatables.

A few hours' sleep in their blankets was all the rest they got, but they were consoled with the cheerful fact that every moment the trail grew fresher.

And now from the horizon line there had risen vast heights of snowy white. Towering yet above them all was a mighty peak which sent forth flame and smoke.

"A volcano!" declared Captain Hardy. "I'll wager we shall find the settlement of the barbarians not far from that."

"I think you may be very sure of it," declared Jack Wallis.

But as they drew nearer the coastline some startling incidents occurred. Jack, who was in advance, suddenly halted. A cry of alarm pealed from his lips.

At the moment they had been approach-

ing a vast pile of conglomerated ice. Suddenly from behind it a number of strange-looking beings sprang forth.

They were gigantic in stature, and dressed in skins, with the tusks of the seal for horns upon their head-dresses, which consisted of untanned seal-hide, with holes for the eyes and mouth.

They were armed with large battle-clubs, with the bones of huge fish or large stones for heads, and javelins tipped with stone or fish-bones.

At sight of the two men they came forward with a rush, brandishing their weapons and yelling.

It was a question of life or death, and there seemed but one move for the two men to make.

"Aim low!" cautioned Captain Hardy. "Take the first man."

Then their rifles spoke. Two of the barbarians fell.

Fortunately our adventurers had good repeating-rifles, and they were enabled to keep up a steady fire.

But the barbarians now began hurling their javelins. One nearly impaled Jack. This caused him to shout:

"This way, Captain Hardy! We must get shelter!"

Both retreated to the cover of some blocks of ice, and the battle went on.

They pluckily held the foe at bay. But the barbarians seemed to become legion in number. It seemed as if a hundred of them at least had appeared upon the scene from some mysterious source.

And now our adventurers made an appalling discovery. This was that they had neglected to bring sufficient ammunition from the ship with them. But a few more rounds of cartridges were left. With blanched faces they looked at each other.

"My boy," said Captain Hardy, steadily, "I fear it is all up with us. At least we will die game."

Wallis shut his lips tightly and resumed the firing. He made every shot tell. But presently he found that he had but three cartridges left.

And the barbarians were every moment growing bolder. A hand-to-hand combat would be sure to be fatal.

A few moments more and they would certainly have overwhelmed the two brave men had it not been for an intervention which came from a most unexpected quarter.

Suddenly what seemed like a veritable bolt of lightning dropped from the sky and right among the barbarians.

There was a fearful explosion.

Tons of ice and snow rose to the height of fifty feet in the air. Dozens of the barbarians were killed.

Astounded, Jack and Captain Hardy

looked up, and beheld a sight the like of which they had never seen before.

"Great Neptune!" gasped the captain. "A ship sailing in the air!"

This was what it seemed. But in place of sails were flapping wings; the hull was of different shape. It was a ship, but not one intended for sailing the seas.

That it was not a supernatural apparition was evident, for at the rail were four men, all of them shouting encouraging words.

"Keep up, friends!" came down from above. "We will help you!"

"Ahoy!" gasped Captain Hardy, in amazement. "Who are you?"

"This is Frank Reade's airship, the 'Meteor.' We are Americans."

"And so are we," replied Hardy. "I've commanded many a good ship in my life, but I never yet saw one that sailed in the air."

At this the aerial voyagers laughed.

"Wait and we will descend!" they cried.

Then the "Meteor" settled rapidly, until it alighted upon the ice. At the rail four men were standing.

One was a tall, handsome young man; another was short and of a studious appearance; one was an Irishman, and the fourth was a negro as black as a coal.

The reader, of course, recognises them as Frank Reade, Barney, and Pomp, and the scientist, Dr. Vaneyke.

They had been in the Antarctic some weeks, and had arrived in the nick of time to save the lives of Captain Hardy and Jack.

Stories were soon exchanged. Frank Reade listened with deep interest to the story of the whalers, and when he was told about Lucille's capture by the Antarctic natives he was at once aroused and cried:

"She shall be rescued, and have no fear, Captain Hardy!"

"Heaven bless you, sir!" cried the overjoyed captain. "Of course, you have it in your power to do so with your airship?"

"I believe so. At least, we shall try."

"Antarctic natives!" cried Vaneyke, at once interested. "Well, that settles one important point, doesn't it—that the South Pole regions are inhabited?"

"It does," agreed Frank. "And yonder are mountains and a volcano."

The scientist was, however, just now interested in the barbarians.

A visit was made to the spot where the bomb had exploded.

Some of the primitive weapons of the barbarians were secured. Several of them had escaped mutilation, and a look was taken at their features.

"Of the Aryan type!" declared Dr. Van-

eyke—"barbarians in every sense of the word. The shape of the skull precludes anything but low intellect."

The remaining or surviving barbarians had vanished. Where they had gone was something of a mystery. Certain it was they were not in sight anywhere.

It was decided to follow their trail as well as possible through the snow.

For some distance the airship kept on. Then the volcano and its attendant peaks drew nearer.

To the surprise of all it was seen that the slopes of the volcanic mountain were devoid of snow. What was more, there actually seemed to be vegetation upon it. But this was probably in the form of Arctic mosses and ferns, which grow in very barren places, and even under the snow.

But as the airship now rapidly drew nearer to the volcano a startling discovery was made.

"Look!" cried Jack Wallis, in amazement. "The mountain is hollow!"

Indeed, the appearance of a mighty yawning cavity in its side seemed to warrant this assertion.

The volcano looked like a walnut-shell cut in halves with its side open.

CHAPTER 5.

The Fight with the Mountain Dwellers.—The "Albatross" Released.—Over the South Pole and Back Again.

CERTAINLY the appearance of the volcanic mountain was unusual in the extreme. What did it mean?

Had internal fires burned it out and made of it a hollow cone? It certainly looked very much so.

But now another startling thing was seen. Into the vast cavity a large body of men were seen to be rushing.

"It is the home of the barbarians!" cried Dr. Vaneyke, in amazement. "More and more wonderful!"

The airship now rapidly settled down at the foot of the volcano, one resolute purpose in the minds of all. They were determined to invade the curious dwelling-place of the natives. It was a moral certainty that the prisoners—Lucille and Mark Vane and Alvan Bates—were therein confined.

Down dropped the "Meteor" until it was on a level with the cavernous opening. It could easily have sailed into the place, but Frank was afraid that collision with the roof might damage the wings or helices.

So he did not venture to enter. But getting down on a level he turned the rays of the searchlight into the place. This revealed a mighty open space, or perhaps it might be called cavern, of several acres in

extent, all roofed by the shell of the volcano. But in the centre of this vast underground area was what looked like a lake of molten gold as it lay under the gleam of the searchlight.

However, Frank saw that it was nothing of the kind, but a vast basin of boiling lava.

A stream of the boiling liquid ran down into the basin from an orifice in the mountain wall.

The walls of the immense cavern were of hardened lava apparently. It was certainly a queer freak of nature.

But this was not all. The Antarctic natives had entered the place, but none of them were in sight. Frank was in a position whence he could easily view the whole interior of the place. But an explanation of their disappearance was easily obtained. Just beyond the lava basin there was a dark, cavernous opening which appeared to trend downwards. Frank understood it all at once.

"I have it!" he cried. "This is only one of many caverns in this volcanic range. The whole region here, doubtless, is honey-combed by the action of currents of lava. Doubtless their retreat is deep down in the bowels of the earth."

Captain Hardy heard this with dismay.

"Then we can never hope to rout them out," he said. "That will not be possible."

"On the contrary, I believe it is possible," said Frank.

"How will you do it?"

"Easiest thing in the world. Simply track them right into their den."

Captain Hardy shrugged his shoulders.

"You cannot go there with your airship," he said.

"Very true."

"How, then, do you propose to go?"

"On foot."

"Mercy! A handful of men like us will stand no show with such a myriad of foes, however insufficiently armed."

"How many of the natives do you reckon there are?" asked Frank.

"At least several thousand."

The young inventor was silent. He realised that there was logic in Captain Hardy's words. But he was not to be defeated.

"Barney," he said, "go down and fetch up those long black boxes in the forward cabin."

"All roight, sor."

The Celt disappeared at once. When he returned he had two of the boxes on his shoulder. They were marked in bold, black letters: "Plain Armour."

"Armour!" exclaimed Captain Hardy. "Is that what you have there, Mr. Reade?"

"That is it," replied Frank.

"What! I supposed the days of armour and knight-errantry had gone by!"

"Neither have as yet," replied Frank, quietly. "I have four suits of this armour, and it is my own manufacture. Did you ever see anything better?"

As Frank said this he took from one of the boxes a shirt of mail, the finest of steel meshes, intricately woven, and all as pliable as cloth. Such was the wonderful armour.

There was a suit from head to foot, including a helmet, with visor and skull-cap. Truly, it was wonderful workmanship.

"It is bullet-proof!" declared Frank. "Nothing ordinary can penetrate it."

"Wonderful!" cried Jack Wallis. "Why, with this armour one man could hold an army at bay!"

"That he could," agreed Frank. "You get into one, Wallis, and you, Captain Hardy, into the other. Pomp will remain with the machine. Barney, don this suit of mail, and at once."

"All roight, sor," replied the Celt, who proceeded to obey.

"Then you propose to wear these suits of mail in attacking the natives?" asked Hardy.

"Certainly," replied Frank. "Thus equipped we can clean out the country. Ah! there is great work ahead for us."

All, of course, were enthusiastic over the prospect. It is needless to say that they were soon ready. Over the rail they went, and stood upon the volcanic ground.

Pomp elevated the airship a few hundred feet for safety's sake after they had gone. Then the four rescuers entered the hollow mountain.

As they did so they noted a peculiar vibration, and at times a distant jarring, jolting sound, as if machinery were at work beneath them.

And doubtless it was, but not machinery made by human hands. The internal fires raging there no doubt caused the tremulous emotion. Indeed the atmosphere was charged with waves of heat, which was evidence enough in itself of that.

Entering the hollow mountain the four mail-clad men skirted the lake of molten lava. The heat from this was something not exactly pleasant to hear. They did not venture too near the edge.

Upon every hand were visible evidences of the great struggle of the volcanic elements in ages past. It was a wonderful sight, and Dr. Vaneyke made the best of it.

As the doctor had not a suit of armour on it was decided that he should remain in the outer cavern, where he would be safer, and at liberty to search for specimens.

Leaving him, therefore, in the outer cavern Frank Reade and his three companions boldly entered the subterranean passage which led presumably to the stronghold of the Antarctic natives.

To their surprise the passage was hardly a hundred feet in length. Then they emerged upon a scene the like of which none of them had ever before beheld.

They were upon a long gallery, from which they looked down into an internal crater fully two hundred feet deep.

A mighty basin it was, covering acres, with small islands of rock in a vast lake of fire and lava.

Great sheets of burning gas at times leaped a hundred feet into the air. Yet certain draughts of air made the gallery secure against the frightful heat.

For some while our explorers gazed upon the scene with wonder.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Captain Hardy. "Inferno could not be worse than that!"

"You are right," agreed Frank. "Certainly it is akin to it."

"Begorra, I'd niver want to fall down there!" cried Barney, with a shiver. "Shure, it's moighty quick yez would come to nothing!"

Nobody was disposed to contradict this logical statement. But Jack Wallis was impatient.

"If we are to save the captives I think we had better move," he said.

Everybody agreed to this, and they now pressed forward along the gallery. For perhaps a hundred yards this followed a winding way, and then a startling view burst upon the rescuers.

Daylight was visible just ahead, and soon they emerged into a narrow and deep valley right among the peaks.

What was the most striking was that this valley was as green as an emerald. Vegetation flourished in this peculiar valley. There were larches, cedars, and spruces, and a peculiar sort of grass interspersed with moss turfed the valley.

This was the home of the Antarctic people. Truly, it was a remarkable spectacle. For many weeks none in the party had gazed upon aught but the white waste of snow and ice. The green valley now seemed to dazzle them.

Presently, however, they saw that a small settlement of stone houses was near at hand. Beyond was a larger one, and in the midst of this was an imposing building covering fully an acre.

It looked as if the Antarctic natives had expected the attack, for they were gathered about their huts ready for battle.

At sight of the white men they set up a fearful yelling, and danced about brandishing their weapons,

"They mean to give us a warm reception, don't they?" cried Frank. "Now, where do you suppose the prisoners are?"

"Probably in that large building," said Hardy, with conviction. "That seems to be the stronghold of the tribe."

"What shall we do? Make an open attack?" asked Jack Wallis.

"First let us see if we cannot treat with them," said Frank.

But this was quickly proved out of the question. The words had barely left his lips when there was a startling sound in his rear.

Instantly, from behind rocks and shrubs, a score of armed barbarians sprang forth and rushed upon our adventurers like an avalanche.

Swinging their battle-axes they looked formidable indeed. The white men had barely time to prepare for defence, so sudden and swift was the murderous attack.

Frank saw at once how useless it was to attempt to treat with the ignorant horde.

It was folly to think of such a thing. Murder was in their hearts, and the only way to wipe it out was to give them battle. So the young inventor cried:

"Look out, friends! Stand by and don't let them get to close quarters!"

The barbarians hurled their javelins with vengeful aim. Some of them went true to the mark; but the points, being only of flint or fish-bone, were easily turned against the armour of the white men, so that the white men in this respect held a great advantage.

They fired almost point-blank with their rifles, and several of the natives dropped dead.

But this did not deter them. Charging with such blind fury the battle could not help but be brought to close quarters.

And here it seemed for a moment as if the barbarians would win. With their heavy battle-clubs, which they swung above their heads with fearful force, they dealt terrible blows.

The armour resisted the point of the axe, but the concussion was something likely to prove almost as fatal. The guns of the white men were but frail guards.

The only thing to do was to keep up a running fire and retreat before the terrible blows. This scattered the fighters, and at the same time made the outlook bad for the white men.

Indeed for a while it began to look serious enough for them. But at this moment Frank Reade chanced to glance upward.

He saw that the airship had come over the peaks, and was now above the valley. Even as he looked he saw Pomp at the rail,

Instantly Frank signalled to him. The astute darkie was not long in grasping the situation. Dr. Vaneyke was now on board with him, having been picked up by Pomp.

"Golly!" gasped the darkie, "I done fink dat Marse Frank am in a bad scrape. Jes' yo' hol' on dar, Marse Vaneyke. I'se gwine to fix dem chaps pretty quick!"

Pomp rushed into the cabin and brought out a dynamite bomb, which he dropped right in the midst of the barbarians.

Instantly there was a terrific explosion. Full a dozen of the wretches were blown into eternity.

Then the airship began to descend. The barbarians seemed to have acquired a fearful terror of the wonderful vessel, and at sight of it now they beat an inglorious retreat.

Up the valley they rushed in headlong haste, while the "Meteor" descended until it was within one hundred feet of the ground.

"All right, Pomp," cried Frank, "hold right where you are. We are going to invade that big stone building. Be ready to give us help!"

"A'right, Marse Frank!" replied Pomp, readily.

The victorious explorers now charged the barbarians' settlement. They deserted their houses and fled incontinently.

Reaching the massive stone structure they dashed through a high arched doorway and found themselves in a long passage.

This proved to be a perfect labyrinth, but finally the rescuers came out in a high-walled room in the centre of the structure.

And here, sitting upon the stone floor and bound hand and foot, were the three prisoners.

Lucille was pale but brave, and at sight of the rescuers gave a great cry of joy. The next moment her bonds were cut, and she was in her father's arms unharmed.

It was a joyful reunion, and among the happy ones was Jack Wallis, who, perhaps the reader has guessed, was madly in love with the captain's daughter.

The airship had descended now, and Dr. Vaneyke was exploring the huts of the barbarians.

"A strange race!" he declared. "Unlike any other on the face of the earth."

He collected much valuable information and many specimens. Then all returned to the deck of the airship.

The gratitude of the "Albatross" people to Frank Reade was of the most intense description.

"We can never forget your kindness," they declared. "But for your aid we should never have effected the rescue, and we should all have met death."

"But what are your plans now?" asked Frank, with interest.

"We must return to the 'Albatross.'"

"And then——"

"Winter here, and, with the first thaw in the spring, sail for home."

"But you have no crew?"

"That is true," replied Captain Hardy. "We shall be short-handed. Yet if none of us die in the meantime the four of us could sail the ship home."

"Yet it will be a terrible experience for you to pass the winter upon the scene of that fearful massacre," said Frank.

"Don't you think the ice-pack could be broken up?"

"Ah!" cried Captain Hardy, eagerly. "If we could have made headway against the wind for only two miles more we should have been in the open sea."

"So I thought," said Frank. "You are right on the edge of the pack. It should not be difficult to get a channel through."

But Captain Hardy shook his head.

"Too much ice."

"If you could reach the open sea you could get north, couldn't you?"

"Oh, yes; the current has already set northward," replied the captain.

"Then have courage," cried Frank, "for I will pull you out of the hole."

The captain was amazed.

"But—how?"

"Wait, and you shall see."

The airship took its flight from the volcanic valley, leaving the terrified barbarians to themselves.

As straight as the birds could fly the "Meteor" returned to the spot where the "Albatross" was nipped in the ice. Then a descent was made.

The first move was to reverently bury the victims of the massacre and restore things to order aboard the ship. Then Frank took a quick and comprehensive survey of the ice-pack.

He saw that the "Albatross" lay between two ridges of block ice. It would take a century to dig a channel through with pick and shovel.

But this was not what Frank proposed to do. He carefully obtained the lay of the ice-pack. Then, at a word from their master, Barney and Pomp began drilling holes four feet deep in the ice.

A line of these holes was drilled at intervals of ten feet, the whole distance of two miles to the open sea. Then dynamite bombs were placed in them, connected with a wire aboard the airship.

Frank pressed the electric key, and a terrific explosion followed. Tons of ice rose in the air and were hurled aside.

A literal channel was made the whole distance of two miles to the open sea, and all that remained now was to clear this of

ice; and soon, to the gratification of everyone, the ice began to move out of the channel of its own accord.

The reason for this was that the Antarctic current had set to the northward and was carrying it along.

In a very few hours the channel was wholly clear. It now only remained to get the ship out of it and into the open sea.

As there was not seaway in the channel sail could not be made. But Frank solved the problem.

A line was carried from the ship's bow a mile ahead, and the airship was lowered and anchored firmly. Then the electric engines were set to work, and one of the propellers was utilised as a drum to wind the line upon.

The engines of the airship, though delicate, were powerful, and in a very short time the ship had been towed to the end of the channel.

Here sail was made, and the "Albatross" stood away to the northward.

Captain Hardy, Jack Wallis, and Lucille stood upon the quarter-deck, and waved a farewell to the aerial voyagers.

"I am so glad that we were enabled to render them such a service," said Frank. "Now for the South Pole!"

"Hurrah!"

Barney and Pomp set about their duties with a will.

"Hi, dar, yo' big I'ishman!" cried Pomp, in an imperious way, "why don' yo' shine up dat brasswo'k in de engine-room?"

"Begorra, an' phwy don't yez make us some bread we kin ate?" retorted Barney, facetiously. "Shure, the last I got hold of was that hard that I c'u'dn't break it wid a sledge-hammer."

"Huh! I done fink yo' am pooty sassy, I'ish. Jes' s'pose yo' makes yo' own bread fo' a while."

"Be jabbers, I'll do it!"

"How am yo' gwine to do it?"

"I'll show yez."

But Pomp blocked the galley door.

"No, yo' don't do anyfing ob de kin'. I done reckon I know wha' yo' want in here. Yo' jest mix my fings all up, an' den Marse Frank gib me a jawing."

"But yez wanted me to make me own bread. Now gimme a chance."

"I'll gib yo' a chaine to see stars, honey, if yo' don't go on about yo' biz."

This excited Barney's ire. The mere allusion to a fight was enough for him. He was more than ready and willing.

"Oh, it's fight yez want!" he cried, clenching his fists. "Shure, I'm jist the lad that kin accommodate yez! Whurroo!"

"Look yer, I'ish," said Pomp, solemnly, "does yo' see de colour ob my eye?"

"Begorra, it'll be blacker than it is now afore I get through wid it!" spluttered Barney.

"Does yo' mean to hit me, chile?"

"If yez don't apologise."

"Wha' fo'?"

"Fer insultin' me, be jabbers!"

"Gwan away! I never 'sulted yo'!"

"Be jabbers, that's a loie! Here's wan fer luck!"

With this Barney made a hit at the darkie. Pomp easily dodged it, however, and retreated a step. Barney came at him again hammer and tongs. At once Africa's blood rose.

"G'way now, yo' sassy I'ishman, if yo' knows what's good fo' yo'se'f. Whoop dar! Look out fo' yo'se'f!"

With this down went Pomp's woolly head. Forward he shot like a battering-ram, his head took Barney full in the stomach, and the Celt was propelled across the cabin floor like a stone out of a catapult, and landed with a terrific crash clear under his own bunk. For a moment he was stunned and utterly unable to tell where he was or what had happened.

Pomp did not follow up his victory. He simply stood still and laughed until the tears ran down his black cheeks and his sides heaved like bellows. Then he went back into his galley and to his bread-making.

Slowly and soberly Barney picked himself up. He said nothing, but went slowly and sadly away.

It seemed a code of honour between the two that hostilities were to cease the very moment one or the other came off victorious.

The airship now took its southward course. The first move was to accurately locate the South Pole, explore some of the frozen regions, take general observations, and then set a northward course for the frigid zone of the Arctic, for Dr. Vaneyke had now persuaded Frank to visit the North Pole as well as the South.

Thus far Dr. Vaneyke was delighted with the result of the trip.

"Even if we never each the other Pole," he declared, "we have accomplished enough now to place our names high upon the scroll of fame."

But Frank said:

"Have no fear, doctor. We are going to reach the Pole, and make what is really a circumnavigation of the globe."

"And all the way in the air!" cried the doctor. "Most wonderful of experiences is this!"

Vast areas of frozen country were passed over. Days of sailing above this desolate waste followed. It is not necessary to describe all that happened on that trip. Suffice it to state that, by taking incessant

observations, the scientist was at last able to state that the "Meteor" was exactly above the South Pole.

The little party held a feast to celebrate the event, and then a course was set to the northward once more, it being Frank's intention to renew their stock of provisions by hunting expeditions as soon as they came to warmer climes.

Straight to the northward the course was now held. The same unvarying monotony of ice and snow continued for many days, then there came a noticeable change in the atmosphere. The sun became visible above the horizon.

And as the airship sped on the ice and snow began to disappear, and the open sea came into view.

Still northward the airship sped, until Kerguelen Land was sighted. Due north was Australia. Not having any desire to go thither Frank changed the course of the airship to the north-west.

This brought them over tempestuous seas, and in these latitudes the airship encountered a terrific storm.

It was the means of well-nigh causing the wreck of the "Meteor."

The voyagers were all in the cabin at dinner. The wheel had been lashed, and the "Meteor" was travelling at a fair rate of speed.

Suddenly something like an explosion brought every man to his feet. The next moment they were hurled about the cabin like puppets.

"Heaven!" cried Dr. Vaneyke, in mortal terror, "the airship is falling!"

"Steady!" shouted Frank. "We must reach the wheel!"

But all was utter darkness. It seemed as if ten thousand fiends had the "Meteor" in hand and were tossing it about like a puppet.

Caught in the arms of the storm the airship was whirled aloft to dizzy heights, and no doubt would have been torn to pieces had it not been for a favourable accident.

Frank Reade had been hurled to the floor of the cabin, and was unable for a moment to stand on his feet.

None of the others could reach the pilot-house. Indeed, it was lucky that none of them reached the deck, for they could not have remained there a moment.

The horror of the situation can easily be imagined when it is remembered that all was utter darkness, and the voyagers were groping about the cabin in the most fearful uncertainty.

But the lucky accident saved the airship and the lives of all on board. The fearful shock of the wind had caused the rotascope lever to fly open. In a moment the full current was on.

The rotascope revolved for all it was

worth. This steadied the airship, and caused it to shoot upward with wondrous rapidity.

This proved their salvation. Up, whirling higher and higher, went the "Meteor." Suddenly the wind ceased, sunlight was all about, and the airship rode in quiet air. But she was shooting upward with frightful velocity.

Frank sprang out on the deck, and at once saw how things were. Far below thundered and bellowed the black clouds of the storm. The airship had risen above it.

The joy of the aerial voyagers knew no bounds. First, though, Frank made a careful examination of every part of the ship. To his amazement not a thing was broken.

"All safe and sound!" he cried, joyfully. "I tell you it was a narrow escape!"

"Luck is with us!" declared Dr. Vaneyke.

As soon as possible Frank checked the flying rotascope. If he had not done so the airship would soon have reached an altitude where it would be painful to breathe.

As soon as the storm had passed the "Meteor" was once more allowed to descend. No other incident worthy of note occurred, until one morning Barney from the pilot-house shouted:

"Land ho!"

At once Frank and the doctor were on deck with powerful glasses. A few moments of study revealed the character of the distant land.

It was the southern coast of Africa, and soon the settlement of Cape Town could be seen. Frank, however, had no intention of landing there, but kept right on.

The country changed as they neared the interior. Vast wilds extended as far as the eye could reach, populated with savages and wild beasts.

Wild beasts could be seen in great numbers from the airship's deck.

Barney and Pomp were spoiling for an African hunt, so Frank decided to gratify their desire and make a brief stop.

CHAPTER 6.

The Lion Hunt.—Barney and Pomp Have a Long Slide.—The Irishman's Disappearance.

FRANK selected a charming little glade in a wild tract of forest near the banks of a river. Here he made a descent, and the travellers were all glad enough to get out and stretch their legs after the long journey in the air.

But first the "Meteor" was securely anchored to make sure that she did not

go off suddenly and leave them. Then Barney and Pomp brought out their elephant rifles.

"Now for sport!" cried Frank. "I presume, though, doctor, you would prefer to do something else?"

"I will remain near the airship and amuse myself," replied the scientist. "Yonder is a rare species of butterfly I want, and there must be many things here to interest me."

Leaving him to pursue the winged beauty Frank, with Barney and Pomp, set out upon their hunt.

In a very short time they were deep in the forest and having rare sport.

Game was almost too plentiful. The abundance of pheasants and hares rather took the edge off the sport. The trio were soon loaded down.

Then, as perhaps was natural, they began to consider the possibility of bagging larger game.

Even as they were discussing this Frank caught sight of some tracks in the soft soil.

"A lion has been this way," he declared. "We could not find greater sport than that."

"Be jabbers, I'm wid yez!" cried Barney.

"Huh! don' be so brave!" sniffed Pomp. "Did yo' ever hunt a lion?"

"Be jabbers, no. But me ancistors hunted the Irish elk," retorted Barney. "Don't yez be so smart to think ye're in yer own counthry."

But the young inventor had already commenced to follow the lion's trail.

For some distance it could be easily picked out. Then Frank shrewdly guessed the truth.

"The animal was going for water," he declared. "If we hide somewhere hereabouts he will pass this way again."

They had come out upon the verge of a wide, grassy plain. But a pile of boulders near afforded a good hiding-place. Here they waited.

Frank knew enough about lions to be sure that this was the safest way to hunt them.

The adventurers had not to wait long. Suddenly a sound came from the forest which literally made the ground tremble.

It was the roar of a lion. The king of beasts was near.

"Sh-h!" exclaimed Frank, in a whisper. "Don't let him see you!"

The next moment the monster came in sight. And he was a monster, too!

For a moment he sniffed the air as if he scented his foes; then he came slowly along the path. It was evident that he was going down to the river for water, and this seemed to suggest that there were two lions in the immediate neighbourhood.

He would surely pass within twenty yards of the hunters. They were all in readiness. It was a critical moment.

Now the lion was just opposite. Frank raised his rifle and took very careful aim. He made the beast's side just behind the shoulder the mark, hoping to reach the heart, then he pulled the trigger.

However, a movement upon the lion's part caused the bullet to strike in the shoulder. The animal leaped in the air, and came down facing the covert from which the shot had come.

"Look out!" cried Frank. "He's coming! Take careful aim!"

With a roar which was deafening the lion made a forward spring; but he never reached the covert. Barney and Pomp fired almost at the same moment. One or both bullets struck a vital part, and the beast rolled over upon the ground and lay motionless.

"Whurroo!" yelled Barney, delightedly. "We've killed the baste!"

And he was about to dash out of the covert when Frank clutched his arm.

"Hold on!" cried the young inventor. "Don't be reckless. There may be a mate to that fellow near."

The warning was well-timed. Indeed a frightful roar was heard, and from another thicket a second lion bounded forth. This was too much for Barney. He subsided at once, and was submissive as a lamb.

The second lion seemed fiercer and larger than the first. The beast remained for some moments stationary, but roaring and lashing its tail. Then suddenly it began to advance until quite near its mate's side. The scent of the blood was enough.

With long strides the monster came straight for the covert where the hunters were confined.

The three rifles cracked almost at point-blank range. But what was most singular was the fact that not one bullet took effect.

The lion came on straight over the pile of boulders.

"Whurroo!" shouted Barney, wildly. "Luk out fer yerselves, ivery wan! Shure, the baste is roight here!"

This was the truth. The next moment the lion was over the boulders. Again the hunters fired, but either the bullets went wide or did not strike a vital part.

The lion came on just the same. He struck Barney full force, and the Celt went down as if hit by a thunderbolt. The lion, however, was unable to check his momentum.

He slipped and slid on the rocks for some yards. The quick presence of mind of Frank Reade saved the day.

The young inventor raised his rifle as

quick as a flash and fired again. This time the bullet went to the mark, and the battle was quickly over.

The huge beast tumbled in a heap. Barney was instantly upon his feet.

"Begorra, I niver got such a basting as that afore!" he grumbled, rubbing his arm. "Shure, the craythur migh kilt me!"

"We can congratulate ourselves upon a very lucky escape," declared Frank. "There was little chance for us. If the lion had closed his jaws upon any one of us it would have been a serious matter."

It was decided to strip the noble beasts of their skins and then return to the airship.

The hunt had proved a glowing success, and all were well satisfied. It did not take Barney and Pomp long to flay the lions. They were magnificent skins, and would make beautiful robes when properly dressed.

When the hunters returned to the "Meteor" Dr. Vaneyke was found busily arranging some botanical specimens. He listened to the account of the lion-hunt with interest.

As nothing was to be gained by lingering longer in the vicinity Frank caused the "Meteor" to rise, and the journey was resumed, it being Frank's purpose now to reach the North Pole in the quickest possible time.

Days passed into weeks. Still the "Meteor" kept on across the Indian Ocean, over India, and the summits of the Himalayas.

Then came Indo-China and the Siberian country. The Steppes were passed over, and finally the shores of the Arctic were reached.

Here it was deemed best to make a descent, as the engines of the "Meteor" had been running so long at such pressure that they really needed attention.

So a descent was made at the verge of a small plateau which was thickly covered with Arctic firs.

"From here," said Frank, "we shall proceed directly over the Arctic Ocean and locate the North Pole inside of a month. Then we can go home."

"After a most successful trip," declared Dr. Vaneyke, enthusiastically.

"Do not say that as yet," said Frank. "We have not reached the end of our journey."

"Still, you do not apprehend any serious times in locating the North Pole, do you? Are not all of the natives friendly?"

"Possibly," replied Frank; "but there are very many perils to consider. At any moment some accident might happen to the airship, and we should then be in a bad fix."

Barney and Pomp were for a time very busy in overhauling the machinery of the "Meteor."

Some of the bearings had to be replaced, and there were many little repairs that occupied a couple of days. Then all rested from their labours on the third day, and a fresh start was made the next morning.

Every day now the distance across the Arctic was lessened. Fur suits were in order, for the cold was most bitter.

"Begorra, it's a sticker to me, shure!" cried Barney, in perplexity. "How iver can it be so much colder at the North than at the South Pole?"

"It is no colder," replied Dr. Vaneyke.

"Phwat's that, sor?"

"I say it is no colder."

"Well, I'm shure it is!"

"Nonsense!" declared Vaneyke. "The thermometer will not agree with your statement. But I think myself that one feels the cold of the Northern frigid zone more than that of the South."

"Well, sor," cried Barney, not to be outdone in an argument, "what's that but being a bit colder?"

"You may be colder," laughed the doctor, "but the weather is not."

Barney did not attempt to argue the subject further. He was satisfied, and now turned his attention to Pomp. For several days he had been itching for an opportunity to play a joke on the darkie.

The Celt did some deep studying, and finally conjured up a game which he believed would settle accounts with the darkie in good shape.

The Irishman succeeded in abstracting what was called an invisible wire from Frank's private locker.

This was a very thin but immensely strong steel wire of about the size of cotton-thread. But it was capable of conducting just as powerful an electric current as one five times the size.

It answered the Celt's purpose to a dot. At once he proceeded to work his plans.

Pomp was very methodical in most of his habits. In retiring he had a certain way of hanging up his clothes, and of tumbling into bed even. It was unvarying in all cases.

His shoes were placed side by side just under the head of his bunk, and always in the same position.

Barney had noted this many times, and had frequently joked the darkie about it.

"Don' yo' fool yo'se'f," Pomp retorted: "dis chile hab been in a house what hab cotched afiah, an' I done believe in habin' everyt'ing ready to tumble into quick in case dar is any fiah."

Barney laughed heartily at the time. But this peculiarity of the darkie now gave him an excellent chance.

That night the darkie retired at his usual hour. It had been his first watch, and it was past midnight when he turned in.

Barney was on duty for the rest of the night. The Celt waited until all was quiet and he was assured that Pomp was sound asleep. Then he crept down into the cabin.

He brought from the dynamo-room the two long coils of invisible wire. These were fastened to screws connected with the dynamos.

Reaching down Barney slipped a small end of the wire into each of the darkie's shoes. This he fastened in such a way that it could not be easily removed, and yet would not interfere with putting the shoes on.

He made a complete circuit, and then turned on the current. Now was the time for the fun to begin.

It was a peculiarity of Pomp's that when suddenly awakened his first move was to don his shoes.

He would no more have thought of leaving his bunk without his shoes on than of flying to the moon.

So Barney had the wires well laid. He made sure that everything was all ready.

Then he leaned over and shouted in the darkie's ear:

"Foire! Foire!"

The result was immediate. Pomp sprang up with a yell:

"Massy sakes alibe! Don' burn dis po' chile up! Sabe me, fo' de sakes!"

"Hurry up!" shouted Barney from the engine-room. "There's no toime to lose. Jump inter yer boots an' come on!"

"Jes' jo' wait fo' me, I'ish!" gurgled Pomp, who had not yet got the sticks of slumber out of his head. "I'se gwine to be wif yo' right away!"

Then the excited darkie made a grab for his shoes. Down into one of them went his foot. The next moment he went sailing up in a convulsive leap and struck the partition overhead.

"Golly—massy—whoop-la! I'se done killed! Sabe dis chile!" he yelled, wildly. "Wha' am de mattah?"

The shoe flew off, and Pomp was instantly relieved. He was wide awake now. He knew that he had received a tremendous shock, but he could not tell whether it had struck him in the feet or his head.

He imagined that the fire had caused some part of the framework of his bunk to become charged.

Could he have seen Barney at that moment in the engine-room he would have been enlightened. The Celt was doubled up into a round ball, laughing for all he was worth.

"Fo' massy sakes, wha' am mah shoe?" spluttered Pomp.

But he saw it at that moment, and reached for it. Happily his hand did not strike the invisible wire.

Again Pomp's foot went down into the shoe with great force. Once again he was literally lifted in the air.

This time the shoe stuck longer, and he went flopping over the floor in agony. Out of compassion Barney shut off the current.

"Begorra, it's square I am wid him now!" he muttered. "Shure, he'll niver thry to play a thrick on me again!"

Pomp had now recovered from his second shock. He put his hand down to the shoe and felt the invisible wire.

In a moment he had it in his hands, and as he followed it a comprehension of all burst upon him.

There was no fire; it was only a neat joke of Barney's, and now he heard the laughter of the Irishman in the engine-room.

"Great 'possums!" he reflected, sagely, "dat I'ishman hab done got de bes' ob me dis time. But I'll bet mah life he don' do it agen!"

Then he crept slowly and sorrowfully back to his bunk.

Barney met Pomp the next morning on the engine-room stairs, but nothing was said. There was a twinkle in Pomp's eyes, however, which boded no good.

Soon the explorers reached the frozen seas. Vast fields of ice, densely packed, extended as far as the eye could reach.

The cold was something frightful, and, to add to the discomforts, a blinding snow-storm began.

For hours the "Meteor" battled with the elements. Then Frank decided to find a good place and wait until the storm was over. Much damage was being done to the wings and helices by the heavy snow.

So the young inventor selected a spot under the cover of a mighty berg or peak of ice, which rose into the air for a height of full a hundred feet. This kept off the brunt of the storm, and here the airship rested safely.

The heating apparatus was taxed to its fullest capacity, for the cold was something frightful.

All remained closely domiciled in the cabin. And here, in the gloom of the Arctic night, the voyagers waited for the storm to cease.

Barney and Pomp were in their usual cheerful mood, and did much to keep up the spirits of the party with fiddle and banjo.

Irish melodies and negro songs were blended, and even Frank sang a sentimental song, for he was possessed of a beautiful tenor voice.

The storm raged for a long time. Indeed it seemed as if the airship must be finally buried in the fearful white drift.

But at length the temperature began to rise, and Barney suggested a little trip outside.

"Shure, I haven't used me snow-shoes yet," he declared. "And here is a most illigant opportunity."

All agreed with the lively Celt. The snow-shoes were brought out and donned. Then the thickest of furs were worn, for the cold was most bitter, and unless warmly clad human life could be supported but a very short time.

Opening the cabin door the voyagers walked out upon the snow-clad deck. It was a wild and wonderful scene which was presented to them. As far as the eye could reach all was one vast snow-bank. The rioting wind had twisted the loose material into all sorts of fantastic shapes. The snow had now ceased falling, and the air was crisp and clear.

Leaving the airship's deck the voyagers walked boldly out upon the huge drifts. Frank Reade led the way to the highest point accessible, and from this a good view of the surroundings could be had.

It was a bleak, desolate, and forbidding region spread to view; yet the white country had its peculiar beauty and charms. Like crystal palaces the distant bergs of clearest ice glistened in the rarefied air.

"Grand!" cried Dr. Vaneyke. "Where will you ever see the likes again?"

"Begorra, I wish I had a toboggan!" cried Barney, pointing to an ice slope near.

"Yo' don' need nuffin' ob dat kind, sah!" cried Pomp. "Jes' slide down on yo' feet an' stiddy yo'se'f wif a pike."

All the party had long pike poles with iron tips to prevent sliding into any hole or dangerous pit. Barney was just in a mood to take up any "dare" that Pomp might offer, so he cried:

"Be jabers, I'll go ye!"

"A'right, I'ish!"

Away went the two jokers at full speed across the snow. They reached the slope a few moments later. The slide was fully a hundred yards in length, and was quite steep and slippery. Frank looked anxious.

"I fear they are rash," he said. "If one of them should fall he might break some bones."

But Dr. Vaneyke laughed.

"Have no fear," he said. "They will make it all safely. It is fun for them."

The two jokers were now on the brow of the descent, chaffing each other in a friendly manner.

"Am yo' ready, I'ish?" cried Pomp.

"Begorra, I am!"

"Then jes' follow me."

With their pikes thrust deep into the ice behind, acting both as rudder and support, they began the slide. The surface seemed as smooth as polished glass. Down they shot at lightning speed.

It required but a few brief seconds to cover the distance. But suddenly, and when halfway down, there was a crackling sound, and Barney threw up his arms and disappeared, while Pomp went on down to the end of the slide.

A cry of horror burst simultaneously from the lips of Frank and Dr. Vaneyke.

"My soul!" cried the young inventor, "my tears are realised!"

They lost no time, but started at once for the spot. Reaching the foot of the slide Frank saw the explanation of Barney's disappearance.

There in the surface of the slide was a yawning hole. The ice in this spot was thin and had covered a pit, into which the unlucky Celt had fallen.

With the aid of his pike Frank crawled to the edge of the hole and looked in.

"Heavens!" he cried, wildly, "Barney has gone to his death!"

"Don't say that!" cried Vaneyke, with horror. "Can we not pull him out of that awful hole?"

"No," replied Frank, sadly. "Barney is beyond earthly aid!"

By this time Pomp and Vaneyke were by Frank's side. A glance into the hole was enough. It was a deep, circular opening, extending downward for twenty feet. At its bottom was a surging, boiling mass of icy waters. Doubtless before this Barney had been carried under the vast field of ice and was beyond earthly aid.

For a moment the three explorers looked at each other in utter horror. Then Pomp began to wail in sorrow.

"Fo' de good sakes, am de I'ishman done gone an' drowned?" he cried. "Den dis chile am lef' all alone. Boo, hoo, hoo! He was jes' de bes' frien' I eber had. Wha' am I gwine to do now?"

Watch was kept at the hole for a reasonable time in the faint hope that the Celt would reappear. But he did not, and sorrowfully the three explorers returned to the airship. But before they reached it they were confronted with new and startling incidents.

The "Meteor" was half-buried in the snow at the foot of the big berg. As Frank and his companions now came in sight of it they paused, overwhelmed with horror.

There, just clambering over the rail, were a number of fur-clad forms.

At first the explorers thought them human beings, but a closer glance showed that they were huge white bears. Six of the monsters were boarding the airship in the coolest possible manner.

"Great heavens!" exclaimed Dr. Vaneyke, "what does that mean, Frank?"

"It looks as if the bears had taken possession of our property," declared the young inventor.

"Can they do any harm?"

"Certainly. We must tackle them at once."

The prospect of tackling the six monsters was by no means a pleasant one.

The white bear is known as a powerful and savage beast, and not easily handled.

But there was no alternative.

They must certainly regain the airship. It was not easy to say how long the bears would remain on board, or what damage they might do.

"Forward!" cried Frank. "Reserve your fire until at close quarters."

This command was obeyed.

When near the rail fire was opened with the rifles. One of the bears tumbled in a heap with three bullets in his carcase.

Frank's plan was to tackle one bear at a time, and fire at him until he succumbed. This would have been all very well had the bears remained inactive.

But this they did not seem disposed to do. At sight of the white men they came to the attack at once.

The white bear is a huge, unwieldy monster, but nevertheless supple and quick in action.

The five remaining bears started for the explorers pell-mell. They were evidently hungry, and regarded them as lawful prey.

"Look out!" shouted Frank. "Separate, and fire as rapidly as you can."

These instructions were followed.

Pomp retreated as fast as his legs could carry him with two of the bears after him. On even ground the darkie might have distanced them, but in the snow-shoes he found it hot work to keep out of reach of their paws. Once overtaken his fate would be sealed.

Knowing this he sped on with all speed. There was no chance to turn and fire until he had gained at least a reasonable distance.

The darkie was all pluck, however, and kept on at a rapid pace. Finally he managed to gain a pinnacle of ice which projected upwards from the plain.

This, he believed, was his opportunity.

Quick as a flash he dodged behind it. Then he drew aim at almost point-blank range and fired at the first bear.

The bullet took effect in the brute's brain through the eye. It staggered back, and then dropped in a heap.

A yell of pleasure escaped from the darkie's lips. He was about to draw back the hammer and throw a second cartridge into the rifle-barrel, when he saw with

horror that there was not another cartridge in the chamber of the repeater.

He had just time to dodge the surviving bear round the ice pinnacle.

Round and round he went, the bear at his heels. The predicament was a comical as well as a serious one.

"Golly, wha' am I gwine to do?" reflected the darkie. "I kain't keep dis sort of fing up fo' ebber."

The bear was enraged at his futile efforts to capture his prey. Pomp eluded him every time.

Then a daring idea occurred to the darkie. He broke away and made a dash for the airship.

If he could reach it and gain an entrance to the cabin he would be saved. Unarmed as he was it was certain death to face the bear.

Swift as he could Pomp ran towards the "Meteor." The bear was growling close to his heels.

Indeed, when the "Meteor's" rail was reached the monster was hardly three yards behind. A dozen more and Pomp would certainly have been captured.

Over the rail at a leap went the darkie. The next moment he reached the cabin door.

He threw his weight against it and it gave way. Into the cabin he sprang. The bear paused at the door.

While the brute seemed to be meditating upon the feasibility of entering Pomp procured a special rifle which threw a deadly explosive shell of Frank Reade's own invention. Pomp took steady aim at the brute and fired.

The shell struck the bear in the chest, penetrating the heart. Pomp had won.

Then the victorious darkie thought of his companions.

"Golly, I done fink Marse Frank am habin' a hard time!" he cried.

This was indeed true. Dr. Vaneyke was dodging his bear behind an ice column, as Pomp had been. But Frank was in hand-to-hand conflict with the two remaining bears.

The young inventor had fired three bullets into the body of one of the bears, but, though somewhat crippled, the beast was yet in fighting trim.

And both had come to close quarters with Frank.

He had drawn his long hunting-knife, and was slashing at the brutes, but it was a moral certainty that he would have been soon overpowered had it not been for the opportune coming of Pomp.

The darkie rushed up at this moment and cried:

"Jes' yo' hol' on, Marse Frank! I'se here, an' I'se gwine to sabe yo!"

Placing his special rifle close against the

body of one of the bears Pomp pulled the trigger. The effect was fatal, and the brute sank dying upon the snow. The other bear Frank quickly finished with his knife.

Then the two victorious hunters went to the rescue of Dr. Vaneyke. This sole remaining bear was easily despatched, and the battle was over.

Beyond a few scratches and cuts the party were uninjured. But all realised what good reason there was for self-congratulation.

"By Jove!" cried Frank, "six bears to three men. That is the biggest luck for one day's hunting that I have ever seen."

"If we had been hunting for such game we could never have found it in such numbers," declared Dr. Vaneyke.

"I don't know 'bout dat!" said Pomp, dubiously. "Dar am a heap of dem critters in dese regions."

"Well," cried Frank, cheerily, "let us remove their pelts, and keep them as trophies of our prowess, anyhow."

This was quickly done. Pomp was an adept at the business, and soon the six pelts were stored away on board the airship.

Then it was decided to ascend and continue the journey to the Pole.

"We ought to locate that very-much-sought spot in two days more," declared the inventor; "then we are homeward bound."

Somehow the sound of the words "homeward bound" had begun to have a powerful charm for the explorers.

The time they had been absent and the thrilling experiences which had been theirs were certainly sufficient to satisfy the most fastidious seeker of wild adventure.

"Surely it will seem good to see home once more," declared Vaneyke, warmly. "And think of the honour which awaits us!"

CHAPTER 7.

Barney or His Ghost!—Dr. Vaneyke Captured by Esquimaux. — Safe and Sound and Homeward Bound.

THEY now lacked the co-operation of Barney, and so it took some time to clear the deck and the helices of the encumbrance. But it was done at length, and Frank was about to send the "Meteor" aloft, when Pomp seized his arm.

"Fo' do sakes, Marse Frank!" screamed the darkie, "jes' cast yo' eye ober yender!"

Frank did so, and saw, painfully clambering over an icy ridge, two men. As they reached its summit and were in full view of the airship one of them shouted:

"Help! Help!"

"Great heavens!" gasped Frank, "that is Barney!"

"Barney!" gasped the doctor.

"Yes, back from the dead!"

"Massy sakes, it am his ghostis!" cried Pomp, in terror. "Don' go ober dere, Marse Frank!"

"Don't be a fool!" cried Frank, angrily. "Come along, both of you!"

Vaneyke followed Frank instantly.

Barney it was, and but just alive. The Celt was covered with a coating of ice.

The man with him was shrunk to a shadow, with pale, cadaverous features. He could hardly creep along, so weak was he.

"Barney," cried Frank, rushing up to the spot, "thank Heaven you are alive! How did you come here, and who is this?"

"Begorra, Misther Frank, it's a long swim I had!" replied Barney. "An' it's nigh dead I am wid me wet clothes. Shure, we'll tell yez all about it whin we get warm."

"Help us, for the love of Heaven!" groaned the pallid wretch.

Nothing more was said until the two exhausted men were helped aboard the airship.

Then Barney was undressed and thawed out, and both were given hot drink and food.

The Celt's story was brief and succinct.

"Shure, whin I fell into that hole," he declared, "fer a toime me head was under wather. Then I cum up into the air, an' all was dark.

"I felt meself being carried along by the current, an' thin all became loight ag'in, an' I kem out into daylight wanst more. I was carried about a moile below here to a big, open basin av wather. I cloimbed out, an' shure, there in the ice, I saw the hull av a big ship.

"Masts nor riggin' there was none—only the hull. An' whin I wint up to it this gentleman crawled out an' spoke to me. Shure, he kin tell his story betther than me."

"Golly, but I am done glad fo' to see yo' ag'in, P'ish!" cried Pomp, with glistening eyes.

"Shure, an' it's glad I am to be wid yez wanst ag'in!" replied Barney.

The Arctic refugee now began, in a weak, quavering voice, to tell his story.

"Three years I have passed in this clime," he declared. "All has been solitude like unto death. Oh, the horror of that time! Three years ago our brig, the 'Valiant,' in command of Captain Alexander Bent, was nipped by the ice and drifted hither, after many months of futile attempts to liberate her.

"I was the first mate—James Spencer—and I am to-day the only survivor. With-

in six months from the nipping of the ship every member of the crew of twelve men, save myself, was dead.

"A fearful disease struck us, and all had it but me. I prayed to be struck down, but Fate ordered otherwise. I buried them all, one by one, in the ice. Then I was left in solitude. Last week I ate my last biscuit. I had no longer strength to hunt. I had given myself up to die, when this man appeared before me. Even now it seems as if I must be dreaming."

"No," cried Frank, cheerily, "you are not dreaming. Cheer up, my good man, for you are sure of getting back home."

"What!" cried the castaway. "Do not mock me. You are cast away here like me?"

"No; this is our ship."

"Ah! but you will never sail it home. This ice will never break up."

"You are wrong!" cried Frank. "This is an airship. We sail in the air!"

"An airship!" The poor fellow passed his hand across his brow in a troubled manner. "No, no, it is really a dream. I shall soon awake, as I have many times before."

Then he lapsed into a reverie.

"Let him be," said Frank, compassionately. "Poor fellow, his brain is weak. He will be stronger soon."

Barney was soon himself again, and as chippy as ever. There was no reason now why the journey should not be continued.

Spencer, the castaway, was asleep. The airship was soon aloft in the air and speeding on its way. Frank, as well as possible, took his bearings.

"Barely two days more," he declared, "then we shall reach the North Pole."

When the exact locality of the Pole was reached the airship descended, and Frank planted a flag upon the spot. This ceremony over, all returned shivering to the airship.

"Now for home!" cried Frank. "Our journey is near its end."

The mention of home had a magic sound, and the castaway, Spencer, was elated. But thrilling events were yet in store.

The course taken by Frank was a straight line for the Arctic Islands and Hudson's Bay.

For days the airship kept steadily on this course. Baffin's Land and many of the small islands in the Gulf of Boothia were passed over in the flight. Then the waters of Hudson's Bay burst upon the view of the voyagers. It was truly a wonderful sight.

As far as the eye could reach all was a waste of tumbling waters, dotted here and there with floating ice.

Frank had not intended to make another landing until home was reached. But an

unforeseen incident prevented the consummation of this plan.

The course was along the east shore of Hudson's Bay. When near James Bay, and at the mouth of the Great Whale River, without warning the airship began to fall.

Down the vessel went, and it was more by luck than good judgment that Barney, who was in the pilot-house, was able to steer to a good landing-place just on the verge of a forest of firs, not one hundred yards distant from the waters of the bay.

Frank went over the machinery critically. He found the defect in the machinery, and decided that it would take at least two days to remedy.

So the anchors were put out and then work was begun. The job was pushed forward as rapidly as possible, and was nearly completed, when in the water of the bay there appeared a number of the peculiar Esquimaux canoes known as kayaks. In each was an Esquimau equipped for seal-hunting.

They landed and approached the airship. Short and squat in figure they were, with greasy countenances. A more villainous-looking set had never been seen by the voyagers.

They conversed with Frank for a while in broken English, and then went away. As they disappeared Frank said, with conviction:

"Do you know, I don't believe we have seen the last of them. I feel sure that we shall have trouble."

"Begorra, there's enough av us to whip them!" averred Barney.

"That may be true," agreed Frank, "but it will put us to the unpleasant necessity of killing a few of them."

That night a careful guard was kept. But it was not until the next day that the real trouble came, and then in an unexpected quarter.

The doctor was enriching his collection of rare fossils, and was about a quarter of a mile from the airship, when suddenly and without warning he found himself surrounded by the Esquimaux.

The doctor was a man of good grit and a clear head. He blew a shrill whistle to warn those at the airship, and then, affecting not to notice their war-like attitude, he addressed the Esquimaux carelessly:

"I am glad to see you, friends," he said. "Do you hunt the seal to-day?"

The chief of the party, a most villainous-looking fellow, only grunted in a surly way in reply.

"White man gib gun to Esquimau," he said. "Come along; be prisoner. Mebbe so he live; mebbe not so he die!"

"Hold on!" said the shrewd scientist. "Just wait a bit, and I will bring you

some more guns," and he started towards the airship.

But some glimmering suspicion of his purpose crossed the mind of the Esquimaux. He put out his hand authoritatively.

"No! White man stay; mebbe no come back. Stay here!"

Vaneyke ransacked his brain in vain for a subterfuge by which to foil the Esquimaux, and finally he was led away into the fir forest. A few moments more of delay and he would have been rescued by his friends.

Frank was in the engine-room when he heard the whistle of alarm. He instantly started up.

"Upon my word!" he cried, "I believe that is Vaneyke calling for help!"

"Begorra, that's his whistle!" ejaculated Barney.

"Quick, then!" cried Frank. "Pomp, you stay with the airship."

Barney and Spencer grabbed their rifles and followed Frank. Soon they had reached the spot where the doctor had been seized by the Esquimaux. Their tracks were seen and understood at once by Frank.

"They have taken him away as a prisoner!" he cried. "Come, we must pursue!"

The trail was followed easily into the fir forest. Here among the fir needles which matted the ground it was lost.

"What can we do?" cried Frank, excitedly. "He must be rescued!"

"Begorra, I'm afther thinkin' that we'd better get the airship ready to pursue the vilyuns!" cried Barney.

"Perhaps that is best," ventured Spencer.

Frank caught the inspiration.

"Upon my word, I believe you're right!" he cried. "There is about three hours' work upon the machinery, then the 'Meteor' can fly. With the airship we can very soon find the wretches and save Vaneyke."

Back to the airship the three men went and to work.

Meanwhile the doctor was having some thrilling experiences. He speedily found that the crew in whose clutches he was had neither mercy nor compunction of any kind. To appeal to them was out of the question. To attempt to conciliate them or make friends would be fatal.

Suddenly the party came out of the fir forest, and were in sight of a long, level plain extending down to the sea.

And near the water's edge were a number of huts made of brush and bark. This was the manner of habitation used by the Esquimaux of this region in lieu of ice.

A vast throng of the Esquimaux came out to meet them. The prisoner was surrounded by a howling mob, some of whom seemed disposed to do him harm.

Arrived in the settlement his arms and legs were bound with thongs, and he was unceremoniously tumbled upon the ground.

Here he lay while the women and children came up and rolled him over, spat in his face, kicked and pinched him unmercifully.

As time passed and his friends did not appear he began to give up hope. His position was becoming unendurable, when suddenly the Esquimaux chief appeared and gave some orders to his men.

The prisoner was lifted, and the thongs which bound his feet being severed he was commanded to stand up.

He did so readily. Then the Esquimaux chief said, in broken English:

"White man mebbe live. He gib Esquimaux man more gun and more fire dust. See?"

The doctor grasped the situation.

"All right," he said; "let me go, and I'll get the guns for you."

But the chief smiled in a leering way.

"Esquimaux no fool. White man go, mebbe stay. No come back, Esquimaux be big fool."

"Well, then, how am I to get the guns for you?" argued the doctor.

"Mebbe see."

The chief beckoned to one of the tribe—a muscular fellow—who came forward.

"He go tell you people he want gun—see? You tell him."

"Well," said the doctor, "let me go with him."

This nearly trapped the wily chief. For a moment he seemed about to agree. Then slowly a cunning light came into his dull, blue eyes.

"Humph!" he grunted. "No do dat. Neber come back, mebbe. Too many kill Esquimaux."

"No, no!" protested Vaneyke. "Our people are friendly."

The Esquimaux chief lifted his huge battle-axe and held it over the doctor's head.

"See?" he said, threateningly. "kill you quick, mebbe you no tell. Do it!"

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Vaneyke was not disposed to be reckless. He saw at once that if he could not gain all the pie, at least a piece would be better than nothing at all.

He realised that if his friends were thus notified of his predicament they would adopt some speedy plan for his rescue, so he said:

"Very well, chief, send your man to my friends. They will give you guns, and then you shall set me free."

Frank had just finished his job of repairing the machinery when the Esquimaux messenger was sighted by Barney, who quickly acquainted Frank with the news.

Frank appeared on deck just as the Esquimaux halted at the rail.

"Well, you greasy rascal, what do you want?" he asked.

"Heap gun!" was the reply. "Mebbe you give me, mebbe no kill you man. See?"

"Ah!" said Frank. "You have got one of our men in your clutches, eh, and you want me to give you some guns, or you'll kill him?"

"Yep-so."

"Well, you atrocious scoundrel," Frank muttered, under his breath, "I'll very soon settle your case."

Aloud he said:

"Come aboard, and I'll go with you to your friends and take the guns to them."

But this did not strike the wretch's fancy.

"No, mebbe not," he said, shaking his head violently. "Mebbe gib me guns!"

"Mebbe I won't!" said Frank, sternly. "Come over, or die!"

He aimed a revolver at the villain. The Esquimaux knew what that meant, and began to beg for mercy.

"Mebbe no kill me. Sabe white man. He live, no kill me!"

"You diabolical rascal!" cried Frank, grabbing the miscreant's collar. "Come aboard here, and no fooling!"

And Frank pulled him over the rail, where he lay cowering upon the deck.

"Now, Barney," he cried, "send her up!"

Barney needed no second bidding.

Up and over the fir forest sped the "Meteor," and it was hardly ten minutes before the Esquimaux village was within view.

The natives at sight of the airship seemed imbued with terror, for they retreated with dismay into their bough huts.

Frank allowed the "Meteor" to descend right on the verge of the settlement. Then he picked up the shivering wretch on the deck and hurled him over the rail.

"Go and tell your chief I want to see him," he said.

In a few moments the Esquimaux chief

appeared. As he stood with folded arms by his hut Frank addressed him:

"You greasy scoundrel! You thought to make a treaty with me and force me to give you firearms, did you? Why, I've a mind to annihilate the whole tribe of you!"

The Esquimaux flashed a contemptuous glance at Frank and replied:

"White man mebbe fly in air, but Esquimaux man no 'fraid ob him."

Frank was amazed at the cool nerve and effrontery of the wretch. For a moment he was silent. Then he said:

"You have one of our men in captivity here. I want him."

The chief shook his head sullenly.

"What! Mebbe no."

"Mebbe yes!" cried Frank, angrily. "Come, I'll wipe out the lot of you if you don't give him up!"

"No can do dat."

"Why?"

"White man killed!"

For a moment Frank reeled as if given a terrific blow. He turned ghastly pale. Then Vaneyke was dead!

"Good heavens, this is awful!" he thought.

But something in the Esquimaux chief's face caused him to start.

"You are lying!" he hissed, leaning over the rail. "Give him up, or I'll blow you and your village off the earth!"

The Esquimaux chief laughed scornfully and gave a peculiar cry. In a moment the vicinity was thronged with armed natives.

Frank saw that the crisis had come. There was no use in dallying further. He picked up a bomb brought him by Barney, and hurled it into the midst of the murderous horde.

In a flash there was a frightful explosion, and dead and dying Esquimaux lay everywhere upon the ground.

The survivors fled wildly. Frank leaped from the airship's deck and rushed into the nearest bough hut.

There was Vaneyke, bound hand and foot.

"Thank Heaven you have come to save me!" cried the scientist. "You are none too soon!"

"But there is yet danger!" cried Frank. "Follow me quickly!"

To the airship they rushed. The Esquimaux were recovering, and seemed ready to fight.

But, though he could have annihilated the whole gang, Frank did not wait for their attack.

Up into the air sprang the "Meteor," while Barney and Pomp flung derisive remarks to the discomfited Esquimaux below. The course was at once set to the

southward, and for a week was firmly held. Then evidences of civilisation appeared.

Canada was passed over, Lake Erie, and then the United States were once more beneath the aerial voyagers.

Home again! There was an indescribable charm in the words.

The airship descended into Readestown one evening, and the next morning the daily papers made much of the return of the voyagers after their long trip.

James Spencer returned to his home, where he was happily welcomed, and Dr. Vaneyke hurried to New York, and reported to the committee of his scientific society of the wonderful researches he had made.

Barney and Pomp were pleased to return to their duties in quiet old Readestown.

"I don' fink I want berry much to do wif dem Arctic countries," Pomp declared. "Dey am a pooty po' place fo' a live man."

"Be jabbers, I'm wid yez, naygur!" cried Barney. "Hurroo fer Ould Oireland an' Afriky!"

The "Meteor" was at once taken to pieces, for the strain of her long voyage would preclude any possibility of ever using her again.

But the young inventor had plenty of other plans to develop, as future stories in this series will prove.

THE END.

A Word from Your Editor

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